St Thomas the Apostle School & Sixth Form College

School Complaints Policy

Updated: January 2025

Agreed by Governors: February 2025

Contents

1. Policy 3

2. Legislation 3

3. Scope 3-4

4. Stage 1 - Informal Complaints 4

5. Stage 2 - Formal Complaints – Referral to the Headteacher 5

6. Stage 3 – Complaint Heard by the Governing Body Complaints Panel 6

7. Stage 4 – Next Steps 8

8. Complaints against the Headteacher 8

9. References 9

Appendix 1 Complaints Form 10

Appendix 2 Model Procedure for Conducting a Stage 3 Governing Body Complaints Panel (GBCP) Hearing 11

Complaints

1. Policy

1.1 St Thomas the Apostle College (STAC) aims to ensure that any complaint by a parent/carer is managed fairly, sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level and that it is resolved as quickly as possible.

1.2 STAC would never wish for a parent/carer to feel, or be made to feel, that a complaint would not be taken seriously, or that in making a complaint, that this might have a negative effect on their child, or his/her opportunities at STAC.

1.3 STAC will aim to resolve every complaint in a positive way and always in a transparent manner.

1.4 STAC expects that most complaints can be resolved informally but guarantees to treat all complaints seriously and confidentially, whether raised informally or formally.

1.5 STAC will make parents aware of the existence of this Complaints procedure, through publication on the School website. A hard copy can also be requested from the main school office.

2. Legislation

2.1 This Policy is compliant with Schedule 1, Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010.

3. Scope

3.1 This Policy applies to all complaints other than the following, where separate procedures apply:

- Child Protection issues;
- Exclusions;
- Appeals concerning Special Needs Assessments;
- Appeals concerning admissions;
- Staff disciplinary matters and
- Concerns relating to curriculum of a school or to its religious education.

4. Anonymous Complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation and or a response.

5. Timescales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

6. Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period and for the above time scale to apply.

Exceptions	Who to contact
• Admissions to schools • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals	Concerns about admissions, statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with Southwark local authority.
• Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance. If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Eva Simcock, 0207 525 0689.
• Suspension of children from school*	Further information about raising concerns about suspension can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions. **complaints about the application of the behaviour policy and safeguarding policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.* https://www.stac.uk.com/Our-School/School-Policies/
• Whistleblowing	We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors. The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus. Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above), depending on the substance of your complaint.
• Staff grievances	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
• Staff conduct	Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate. Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed and its conclusion (without outcome).
• Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.

• National Curriculum - content	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

7. Stage 1 - Informal Complaints

7.1 Most complaints where a parent/carer seeks intervention, reconsideration, or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching, disciplinary matters (but not exclusions) and issues manifested outside the classroom. Parents/carers should raise the complaint initially with the subject teacher, Head of Department, Head of Year, Deputy Head Pastoral or the Headteacher as appropriate, at a meeting in person. At this meeting, the complainant should be asked to complete the Complaints Form (Appendix 1) which must be returned to the Clerk of the Governing Body.

7.2 Unresolved complaints: A complaint which has not been resolved by informal means should be notified as a formal complaint in accordance with Stage 2 below.

7.3 Record of complaints: In the case of complaints raised under Stage 1, the only record of the complaint and its resolution will be file notes by the person dealing with the complaint and/or file correspondence between the person raising the concern and the respondent. This would include the completed Complaints Form (Appendix 1).

7.4 Timescales: Complaints should be raised **within 10 working days** of the matter that arose which gave rise to the complaint. STAC aims for this Informal Stage to be completed **within 10 working days**. Any complaint received during a school holiday or within 10 working days of the end of term or half term may take longer to resolve.

8. Stage 2 - Formal Complaints – via referral in writing

8.1 Notification: An unresolved complaint under Stage 1, a complaint which needs investigation or a more serious dissatisfaction with some aspect of STAC's policies, procedures, management or administration, should be set out in writing using the Complaints Form (Appendix 1). This should include full details and be sent with all relevant documents and full contact details to the Head teachers PA * for the attention of the Headteacher. If a formal written complaint is received by another member of STAC's staff, this should be immediately passed on to the Headteacher.

8.2 Acknowledgement: The complaint will be acknowledged in writing normally **within 3 working days** of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays. The acknowledgement will indicate the action that is being taken and the likely timescale for resolution, in accordance with this Policy as set out below.

8.3 Investigation and resolution: The Headteacher will determine who has responsibility for responding to a formal complaint, including the decision about his/her own involvement. Subject to that provision, the Headteacher will delegate a senior member of staff to act as an Investigating Officer. If the complaint is against the Headteacher please refer to point 11 of this policy. The Investigating Officer may request additional information from the complainant and will fully investigate the issue. In most cases, the Headteacher or Investigating Officer will meet or speak with the parent/carer to discuss the matter. Unless unavoidable, members of the relevant Governing Body should not become involved at this stage to avoid prejudicing their possible future involvement. The Investigating Officer should write a written

recommendation of outcome to the Headteacher, who will in turn inform the complainant.

8.4 Record of complaints: Written records will be kept of any meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

8.5 Unresolved Complaints: These will be referred to Stage 3 (see below).

8.6 Timescales: Complaints should be raised **within 10 working days** of the matter that arose which gave rise to the complaint. STAC aims to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution to the complaint **within 20 working days** from receipt of the complaint. Any complaint received during a school holiday or within 20 working days of the end of term or half term may take longer to resolve.

9. Stage 3- Complain Heard by the Headteacher/ Executive Headteacher

9.1 in the unlikely event that the complainant is not satisfied by the school's handling of their complaint at the level of stage 1 or stage 2 the complainant can request for the Headteacher to review the complaint directly along with the previous recommendations and response.

9.2 At this stage the Headteacher/ Executive Headteacher will review both the initial complaint and the school's response followed by written correspondence with the complainant of their findings within 10 working days. As part of this process the complainant may be invited to give further representation in person.

10. Stage 4 – Complaint Heard by Governing Body Complaints Panel (GBCP)

9.1 Request: A request for a complaint to be heard by the Governing Body Complaints Panel, hereafter referred to as the GBCP, (an Appeal) must be made in writing within 10 working days of the date of STAC's decision made at Stage 2. This request should be made to the Headteacher (by letter or e-mail) including a copy of the original written complaint and also indicating which matters remain unresolved. No new complaint may be included. Upon receipt of the written complaint it will be forwarded to the relevant members of the Governing Body.

9.2 Acknowledgement: Where an appeal is received, a Clerk to the GBCP will be appointed who will acknowledge, in writing, receipt of the appeal and inform the complainant of the steps involved in the process. The Clerk will be the contact point for the complainant throughout the duration of this stage.

9.3 Panel Hearing: The Clerk will aim to convene a GBCP Hearing as soon as possible, **normally no later than 20 working days** after receipt of the Stage 3 complaint. The final decision should be communicated no later than **10 working days** after the Hearing has taken place, so that the total time between the submission of a Stage 3 complaint Hearing and communication of the GBPC's findings is no more than **30 working days.**

9.4 Panel Membership: The Panel will consist of three members of the Governing Body who have not previously been involved in the complaint. The process used for selecting the independent person will conform to relevant guidance. It might, for example, involve using a Governor from another school. In deciding the make-up of the Panel, Governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the

categories of Governor and be sensitive to the issues of race, gender and religious orientation. The Panel will select its own Chair.

9.5 The GBCP can:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part;
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint and/or
- Recommend changes to STAC's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

9.6 Attendance: In addition to the Panel itself (see 9.4), the following are entitled to attend the Hearing, submit written evidence and address the Panel:

- The parents/carers and/or one named representative;
- The Headteacher and/or one named representative and
- Any other person who the Complaints Panel considers to have a reasonable and just interest in the appeal and whose contribution would assist the Panel in their decision making.

9.7 Evidence: All parties will be given the opportunity to submit written evidence to the Panel in support of their position including:

- Documents;
- Chronology and key dates and
- Written statements setting out further detail of the issues.

9.8 All written evidence must be received by the Clerk no later than 5 working days in advance of GBCP Hearing. The Clerk will distribute the evidence to all parties in advance of the GBCP Hearing.

9.9 The evidence will be considered by the Panel along with the initial complaint.

9.10 The aim of the Hearing, which will be held in private and on the school's premises, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between STAC and the complainant.

9.11 The Panel will reach a decision, and make any recommendations **within 10 working days** of the Hearing**,** as noted in 9.3 above. The decision reached is final.

9.12 The Panel's findings will be sent in writing to the Clerk, to the parents/carers, the Governing Body, the Headteacher and, where relevant, to the person or persons about who the complaint was made. The letter will state the reasons for the decision reached and include any recommendations made by the Panel.

9.13 The Role of the Clerk: All Panels considering complaints must be clerked. The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and is required:

- To set the date, time and venue of the Hearing, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible;
- To collate any written material and send it to the parties in advance of the Hearing;
- To meet and welcome the parties as they arrive at the Hearing;
- To record the proceedings and
- To notify all parties of the panel's decisions.

9.14 The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body or Nominated Governor: This is:

- To check that the correct procedure has been followed and
- If a Hearing is appropriate, to notify the Clerk to arrange the Panel.

9.15 The Role of the Chair of the Panel: The Chair of the Panel has a key role, ensuring that:

- The remit of the Panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption or prejudice;
- The offer of an interpreter is made if appropriate;
- The issues are addressed;
- Conjecture is challenged;
- Key findings of fact are made;
- Parents/carers or others who may not be used to speaking at such a Hearing are put at ease;
- The Hearing is conducted with each party treating others with respect and courtesy;
- The GBCP is open minded and acts independently;
- No member of the Panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure;
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions and
- Written material is seen by all parties. (If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.)

9.16 Record Keeping: STAC will keep a record of all Hearings, decisions and recommendations of the GBCP.

10. Stage 4 – Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2. The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by St Thomas the Apostle School & Sixth Form College. They will consider whether St Thomas the Apostle School & Sixth Form College has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

11. Complaints against the Headteacher

11.1 In the first instance, the parent/carer should write to the Chair of the Governing Body. This is Stage 1 of this formal complaints procedure.

11.2 The Chair of the Governing Body will meet with the parent/carer **within 5 working days**, unless there are exceptional reasons which require a more urgent meeting, or

unless the Chair of the Governing Body and the parent/carer agree that there are sensible reasons for a longer delay.

11.3 If, following that meeting, the parent/carer wishes to pursue the complaint, the Chair of the Governing Body will write to the parent/carer setting out their conclusions and the proposed course of action **within 5 working days** of the meeting.

11.4 If still dissatisfied, the parent/carer should then write to the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body indicating their desire to complain further, **within 10 working days**. This is Stage 2, and the Final Stage of this formal complaints procedure.

11.5 The Vice-Chair will then convene a GBCP, which must include no fewer than three Governors excluding both the Chair of the Governing Body and any Governors who have been involved in the process. It will be chaired by the Vice-Chair of Governors. The GBCP must also include one independent person who has no involvement in the management or running of STAC. The panel may meet, individually or jointly, with the Headteacher and the parent/carer as part of their discussions, at their discretion. This panel will meet **within 10 working days** of the Vice-Chair receiving the written complaint.

11.6 The GBCP will report back formally **within 10 working days** of Hearing the complaint and the Vice-Chair of the Governing Body will write to the parent/carer concerned directly.

11.7 If the parent/carer remains dissatisfied following Stage 3, then they have the right to raise the matter with the Secretary of State or his representatives through the routes described by the Education Funding Agency.

12. References

12.1 http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/p/june%20efa_academiescomplaintsprocedure_ju ne12_4%200.pdf

Appendix 1

Complaints Form

Please complete and return to the Clerk of Governors, Miss C. Eels (c.eels@stac.southwark.sch.uk) who will acknowledge receipt and explain the complaints process.

Name	
Address	
Telephone number (day)	
Telephone number (evening)	
Name of student	
Relationship to the student (if relevant)	
Brief details of complaint	
Action taken, if any, to seek to resolve the complaint? (e.g. Who has been spoken and what was the response?)	
Please note any possible actions that might in your opinion resolve the problem at this stage.	
Please list the title of any relevant further information that is attached. Note: Any evidence or information will be formally acknowledged.	
Signature(Complainant)	
Date	

Appendix 2

Model Procedure for Conducting a Stage 3 Governing Body Complaints Panel (GBCP) Hearing

1 The Chair of the Committee should invite all parties (except any witnesses) into the room, introduce them and explain the role of each person.

2 The Chair should explain to all present that the purpose of the Hearing is to review the complaint and try to resolve it and achieve reconciliation between STAC and the complainant. However, it may only be possible to establish the facts of a situation and make recommendations about future action.

3 The Chair should then ascertain whether the proposed procedure is acceptable. If so, the meeting will proceed along the following lines:

- The complainant will describe her/his complaint and may call witnesses;
- The Headteacher may seek clarification from the complainant and any witnesses;
- The GBCP or its advisers may seek clarification from the complainant and any witnesses;
- The Headteacher will respond to the complaint and may call witnesses;
- The complainant may seek clarification from the Headteacher and any witnesses;
- The GBCP (including any advisers) may seek clarification from the Headteacher and any witnesses;
- The Headteacher will be given the opportunity to sum up;
- The complainant will be given the opportunity to sum up and
- Both parties will leave the room to allow the GBCP to deliberate but any advisers may remain to offer technical and procedural advice.

4 The GBCP should make a decision or judgement on:

- The validity of the complaint;
- The propriety of action taken by STAC and/or parent/carer and

Where appropriate, the GBCP should also make recommendations on changes to STAC systems or procedures to ensure similar problems do not arise in the future.

5 The decision or judgement will be confirmed in writing **within 10 working days**.

NB If there is more than one complainant this procedure should be followed for each one in turn, unless the complainants agree to the complaints being held consecutively.