



Complaints Procedure Policy

Document control

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Policy summary

This policy explains how parents can raise a concern or make a complaint, what happens at each of the three stages, the timescales we work to, how we handle complaints about personal data, what we record and for how long, and where to go if a matter is still unresolved at the end of the procedure.

Contents

1. Why this matters	2
2. What we are seeking to achieve.....	2
3. Scope and application.....	3
4. Definitions — how we measure time.....	3
5. Roles and responsibilities.....	3
6. Raising a concern informally (Stage 1)	4
7. Making a formal complaint (Stage 2).....	4
8. Referral to a Complaints Panel (Stage 3)	5
9. Complaints about how we handle your personal data	5
10. Confidentiality	6
11. Records we keep	6
12. If you remain dissatisfied at the end of the procedure	6
13. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)	6
14. Working together respectfully	7
15. Training and communication	7
16. Monitoring, review and publication	8
17. Related School policies and procedures	8
18. Legislation, regulation and guidance	8

1. Why this matters

Cokethorpe School is committed to offering education, pastoral care and communication of the highest quality. We value the partnership between the School and parents, and we welcome your comments, suggestions and ideas about the quality of what we provide.

When something is not right, we want to know. Hearing your concerns helps us to put things right for your child and to improve for everyone. We take concerns and complaints seriously, we treat everyone with courtesy and respect, and we aim to resolve matters as early, openly and fairly as possible.

2. What we are seeking to achieve

When you raise a concern or a complaint, we aim to:

- make it easy for you to know how to raise a concern or complaint;
- listen carefully, treat you fairly and keep an open mind;
- carry out a full and fair investigation;

- respect confidentiality where it is requested, so far as we are able;
- address the points you raise and give you a clear response;
- act on what we find and use it to improve; and
- deal with matters as quickly as we reasonably can, and keep you informed if we need more time.

A complaint is treated as an expression of genuine dissatisfaction that needs a response. We recognise that raising a concern takes confidence, and we want you to feel able to do so. It is our policy that a complaint made by a parent will not adversely affect their child.

3. Scope and application

This procedure is for parents and guardians of pupils currently registered at the School. In this policy, "parents" includes those with parental responsibility, such as guardians and carers.

A few points of scope:

- Prospective parents (whose child is not yet registered) are welcome to raise questions, but the formal stages of this procedure are for current parents.
- A complaint from a former parent will normally be considered only where the matter was first raised while the pupil was still registered at the School.
- Some matters are handled under other School procedures — for example, exclusions and required removals, admissions decisions, and matters covered by the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. Where this is the case, we will tell you which procedure applies and how to use it.

In accordance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding School year are available from the Head's Assistant.

4. Definitions — how we measure time

To make our timescales clear and consistent, this policy expresses time limits in working days.

"Working days" means weekdays during School term time, excluding weekends, bank holidays and School holidays (including half-term).

If you raise a complaint during a School holiday, or very close to the end of term, we will acknowledge it as soon as we can and the relevant timescales will begin on the first working day after the School reopens. If we ever need longer than a stated period, we will explain why and tell you when you can expect to hear from us.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Any member of staff	Receiving a concern raised informally at Stage 1, making a written record of it and the date received, and sending it to the Head for information.
Head	Overall ownership of this procedure; consideration and decision at Stage 2; attendance at a Stage 3 panel hearing.
Chair of Governors	Consideration of complaints about the Head; establishing a Complaints Panel at Stage 3.
Complaints Panel (three members, at least one	Hearing the complaint at Stage 3, reaching a decision and making any recommendations.

independent)	
Head's Assistant	Receiving written complaints addressed to the Chair of Governors and holding the record of complaints registered under the formal procedure.
Bursar (designated data protection contact)	Handling complaints about the School's processing of personal data.

6. Raising a concern informally (Stage 1)

Most concerns are best raised early and informally, and can be resolved quickly through friendly discussion. You can speak to any member of staff, or write, email or telephone. Please be as clear as you can about what is troubling you and what you would like to happen.

It is often best to start with the person most closely concerned — for example your child's class teacher, tutor or Head of Year, or the Director of Sport for a matter relating to games. You are also welcome to raise a matter with a more senior member of staff, such as the Deputy Head Academic, the Deputy Head Pastoral and Wellbeing, the Director of Co-Curricular, the Head of Sixth Form, the Head of Prep School or the Head.

The member of staff will make a written record of the concern and the date it was received, and will send it to the Head for information. Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days, or in the event that a satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, you will be advised to proceed with your complaint in accordance with Stage 2.

If your concern is about the Head, please raise it with the Chair of Governors, in writing, via the Head's Assistant.

If the matter is not resolved to your satisfaction at this informal stage, you can take it forward under Stage 2.

7. Making a formal complaint (Stage 2)

If a concern cannot be resolved informally, please put your complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will consider the matter and decide on the appropriate course of action. The Head (or a senior colleague nominated by the Head) will speak to or meet you to discuss the matter, normally within 10 working days of receiving your written complaint, and will keep written records of all meetings and interviews.

The Head will try to resolve the matter at this stage, carrying out any further investigation that is needed. Once the relevant facts have been established so far as is practicable, the Head will make a decision and confirm it to you in writing, normally within 20 working days of receiving your written complaint. If more time is needed, we will explain why and tell you when to expect our response.

If your complaint is about the Head, it will be considered at this stage by the Chair of Governors, who may nominate another Governor to consider it.

If you are not satisfied with the decision at Stage 2, you may ask for the matter to be considered by a Complaints Panel under Stage 3.

8. Referral to a Complaints Panel (Stage 3)

If the matter has not been resolved at Stages 1 or 2, you may write to the Chair of Governors (via the Head's Assistant), setting out the basis of your complaint. Please make your request within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 decision. We may accept a later request where there is a good reason for the delay.

The Chair of Governors (or a Governor nominated to investigate) will establish a Complaints Panel of three people who have had no direct involvement in the matters raised. At least one panel member will be independent of the governance, management and running of the School. One member of the panel will act as Convenor.

The Convenor will acknowledge your request and arrange a hearing as soon as practicable, normally within 20 working days of receiving your written request. Copies of any documents to be considered will be provided to everyone involved not less than five working days before the hearing.

You may bring someone with you to the hearing — for example a relative, teacher or friend. This procedure is intended to be non-adversarial. Legal representation is not appropriate, and anyone accompanying you should not attend in a legal capacity. The Head is entitled to attend the hearing and may also be accompanied.

A note-taker will attend the hearing to keep a note. This will not be a verbatim note but an accurate reflection of what was discussed. Notes of the hearing will be shared with attendees as soon as practicable after the hearing. To the extent there is any disagreement about the content of the notes or further comments from the parties, these will be considered by the Convenor, and any comments will be appended to the notes.

The Panel will consider all the relevant facts. It may uphold or dismiss the complaint in whole or in part, and it may make recommendations. The Panel cannot require the School to pay financial compensation. Where further investigation is needed, it will be carried out as the Panel directs.

The Panel will reach its decision and make any recommendations normally within five working days of the hearing, and will confirm its decision and the reasons for it to you in writing, usually within five working days of reaching it. The decision of the Panel is final.

The Panel's findings and any recommendations will be sent in writing to you (the complainant), to all Governors and to the Head, and, where relevant, to the person who was the subject of the complaint. A copy will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.

9. Complaints about how we handle your personal data

If your complaint is about how the School has handled personal information, you have a right to raise it with us directly. Please contact the Bursar, who is the School's designated data protection contact, who will handle your complaint under this procedure and in line with data protection law. The School provides an electronic complaint form on its website for this purpose.

In these cases we will acknowledge your complaint within 30 days of receiving it, take appropriate steps to look into it without undue delay, keep you informed, and tell you the outcome. This reflects the requirements introduced by the Data (Use and Access) Act 2025, which took effect on 19 June 2026.

Where a data protection concern forms part of a wider complaint, it will normally be dealt with as part of that process. The School will formally acknowledge the data protection aspect within 30 days.

You also have the right to raise a data protection concern with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). We would, however, welcome the opportunity to put things right first.

10. Confidentiality

We will treat your complaint confidentially and with respect. Knowledge of it will be limited to the Head and those directly involved, and the Chair of Governors may need to be informed.

There are limited situations in which we may need to share information more widely – for example where a child's safety is at risk, where we are required to refer a matter to the police, or where disclosure is required as part of the School's inspection under the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (including a request by the Secretary of State or an inspection body under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008), or where another legal obligation applies. We will share only what is necessary and proportionate.

The School will provide the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period and the action taken as a result of each complaint.

11. Records we keep

Following the resolution of a complaint, we keep a written record of all complaints – whether resolved informally, at the formal stage or at a Panel Hearing – together with any action taken as a result, and whether or not the complaint was upheld. Anonymous complaints may not be pursued.

Records relating to specific complaints are kept confidentially according to the School's data retention schedule. Routine complaints are destroyed six years after the closure of the complaint, but records are kept longer if the complaint relates to an ongoing legal issue, safeguarding issue, public enquiry or other matter requiring extended retention. Records relating to the EYFS are kept until at least the next ISI inspection and are made available to ISI and Ofsted on request.

Personal data processed as part of a complaint is handled in accordance with the School's Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy.

12. If you remain dissatisfied at the end of the procedure

We hope that this procedure resolves your complaint. If it does not, and you have completed all three stages, you will be provided with information about alternative dispute resolution at the conclusion of the process.

13. Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

We will investigate any complaint relating to our fulfilment of the EYFS requirements and notify you of the outcome within 28 days of receiving the complaint. The record of EYFS complaints is made available to Ofsted.

Parents may contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) regarding EYFS requirements via the contact details and reporting arrangements published on the ISI website. Parents may also contact Ofsted via the contact details published on the Ofsted website.

14. Working together respectfully

We are committed to dealing with every complaint fairly and impartially and to providing a high-quality service. In turn, we ask that everyone works with us courteously and constructively. We will not normally limit the contact you have with the School, but we do not expect our staff to tolerate behaviour that is abusive, offensive or threatening, and we will take action to protect them.

We regard behaviour as unreasonable where it hinders our consideration of a complaint because of its frequency or nature — for example where a complainant:

- refuses to articulate the complaint, its grounds or the outcome sought, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the investigation;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are outside the scope of this procedure;
- insists the complaint is dealt with in ways incompatible with this procedure or good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information and expects it to be taken into account and commented on;
- raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions and insists they are answered immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff dealing with the matter and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint despite previous investigations concluding it is groundless or has been addressed;
- refuses to accept the findings where this procedure has been fully and properly completed, including any referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on School time through frequent, lengthy and complicated contact in person, in writing, by email or by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- uses threats to intimidate;
- uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language, or violence;
- knowingly provides falsified information; or
- publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

While a complaint is being progressed, it helps if communication about it is kept proportionate; repeated correspondence can delay the outcome. If unreasonable behaviour continues, the Head will write to explain why the behaviour is unreasonable and ask for it to change. Where a complainant's contact causes a significant level of disruption, the School may agree a communication plan that specifies methods of communication and limits the number of contacts. Any such plan will be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the School will contact the police immediately and confirm its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the School site.

15. Training and communication

This policy is published on the School website and is available in hard copy on request. Staff are briefed on the procedure so that they know how to receive a concern courteously, record it accurately and pass it on promptly. Those who investigate complaints or sit on a Complaints Panel receive guidance appropriate to that role.

16. Monitoring, review and publication

The Head keeps the operation of this procedure under review and reports to Governors on complaints activity. In accordance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding School year is available from the Head's Assistant, and a written record of all complaints and the action taken is provided to the Independent Schools Inspectorate on request. This policy is reviewed annually.

17. Related School policies and procedures

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following School policies and procedures:

- Promoting Good Behaviour
- Prevention of Bullying Policy
- Discipline, Exclusions and Required Removal Policy
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures
- Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notice
- Guidelines on the Storage and Retention of Records
- Parent Contract / Terms and Conditions

18. Legislation, regulation and guidance

This policy has regard to the following, in each case the version currently in force:

- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (Part 7 of Schedule 1)
- Independent School Standards: Guidance for Independent Schools (current edition – April 2026)
- The Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework (current edition)
- The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) Inspection Framework (September 2023) and Handbook (updated September 2025)
- The Data (Use and Access) Act 2025 and the Data Protection Act 2018 / UK GDPR (data protection complaint-handling duty, in force from 19 June 2026)
- The Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015
- The Equality Act 2010

Where safeguarding is relevant, the School's arrangements reflect Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026, which is in force from 1 September 2026.