



Complaints Policy and Procedure

This policy applies across the College at all age ranges including Early Years, Prep and Senior Schools.

St. Columba's College is conducted in the educational tradition of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. As such it nurtures a holistic environment which includes a commitment to academic excellence, religious values, friendly discipline, and personal attention.

Policy owner: Headmaster
Date reviewed: Nov 2025
Date of next review: Nov 2026
Ratify by governors: Board

Principles

The College believes that constant feedback is an important aspect of school improvement and raising standards. Open, honest, and supportive communication is valued. The nature of the College as a collaborative community, based on trust and shared values and purposes, requires an effective mechanism for managing complaints. Students, parents and staff are encouraged to share their views and opinions and any concerns they may have. People who have concerns or complaints, whether they are students or adults, should feel that they can be voiced and will be considered seriously, dealt with comprehensively and as far as possible in confidence.

In this Policy, “working day” means any day that is not a Saturday, Sunday or a Bank Holiday, and which falls within the College’s term time as published on its website. In calculating the number of school days in any scenario, the day of receipt and the day of reply shall not be counted.

Practices

A working assumption of the policy is that complaints are best dealt with by those nearest to the point of concern (please see guidance at end of this policy for whom to direct an issue). The first stage of the process should be informal, but if that fails to resolve the complaint, then the complainant should be asked to put their issue in writing to the staff member responsible.

The policy aims to ensure that all complaints are dealt with as quickly and sensitively as possible, and by the person best able to do so. A complainant should be able to expect to have a response, even if not the final response, to their complaint within 24 hours of having made the complaint. Parents are made aware of the procedures for making complaints and appealing against decisions through the availability of the policy on the website and through communication at the point a complaint is levelled.

Who may complain?

This policy is applicable only to parents of pupils who are currently on the College’s roll (and not to parents of prospective pupils). The only exception to this is that complaints made by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this policy if the complaint was initially raised when the relevant pupil was still registered as a pupil at the College. The expression “parent” is used for all those having parental responsibility for a child. There is no formal procedure governing the making of a complaint to the College by any person who is not a parent. Any non-parent who wishes to make a complaint should do so by putting it in writing to the College’s Headmaster, who will consider how best to respond.

The complaints policy would not be used in relation to:

- Decisions taken by the College in relation to exclusion and required removal from the College. (Which will be dealt with under the College’s Exclusion Policy).
- In respect of child protection allegations (which will be dealt with in accordance with the College’s Safeguarding Policy and Procedures).

- Where the complaint is against the decision of an external agency or third party such as an examination board or higher education institution
- To delay or avoid payment of any sum (including fees or fees in lieu) due under the College's parent contract agreed to by parents upon enrolment of their child at the College
- To re-open a complaint on a matter in respect of which the process set out in the procedure has already been exhausted.
- To make a complaint about services provided by other providers who may use the College's premises or facilities (parents should follow the external provider's own complaints procedure).

Parents should also be aware that:

- If multiple complaints are received from parents within the College that are all based on the same subject, the College may decide to send a uniform response to all complaints or to publish a single response (for example, on the College's website).
- Requests for financial awards, such as claims for compensation, damages or fee refunds, are beyond the scope of this procedure.
- If a complaint involves an allegation against a staff member or another pupil, parents will not be entitled to details of any sanctions imposed on the staff member or pupil.
- Where a complaint involves questioning the judgement of a member of the College's staff, the role of any person considering that complaint will be to determine whether that individual's judgement was exercised fairly and reasonably and according to the College's policies and procedures. There may be more than one fair and reasonable response to a situation and a decision-maker at any stage will not normally substitute their decision for the decision of the staff member concerned.
- If a complaint ostensibly raised on behalf of a parent is raised via a method of communication previously unseen by the College (i.e. an email address that has not been provided as a contact method), the College may contact the relevant parent via known contact details to confirm that the complaint is genuinely made.

For the sake of clarity, it is important to establish that there is a difference between a concern and a complaint.

What Constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is any matter about which a parent of a pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the College. It may be made about the College as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff and is likely to arise if a parent believes that the College has done something wrong or failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly. A breach of the law will always constitute a complaint.

A written record is kept of all formal complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stages or whether they proceed to the Board of Governors.

The Three-Stage Process

The College follows a three-stage process for dealing with complaints, which operates as follows:

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their child's class teacher or Head of House, as appropriate. More information re. contact details in the case of a complaint are included towards the end of this policy, including other key staff details. In many cases the matter will be resolved straight away to the parents' satisfaction. If the teacher/Head of House cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult with an appropriate member of the College Leadership Team, who will keep the Headmaster informed.
- The teacher will acknowledge the complaint to the parent(s) and record the issue on the online complaints form, the date on which it was received, and any action taken by the College as a result.
- Action taken by the College in response to a complaint at this stage may include reassurance and advice, reference to relevant policies and procedures, an apology for an oversight or mistake and/or a change in practice. It may also be the case that no action is needed.
- Should the matter not be resolved within 10 school days of receipt of the complaint then the parent(s) will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Policy.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If a complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis at Stage 1, then the parents should put their complaint in writing (by email is sufficient) to the Headmaster (or Head of the Prep School if their child is a pupil in the Prep School) as soon as possible and include in their letter, what action they would like the College to take.
- The Headmaster/Head of Prep will acknowledge receipt and will contact the parents within 5 school days, to see if a resolution can be reached at this stage by means of an informal conversation or meeting with another member of the College Leadership Team. If resolution cannot be reached in this way, the Headmaster/Head of Prep School will confirm that the matter will be treated as a formal complaint and proceed to investigate it. The Headmaster /Head of Prep School should ordinarily provide a written response to the parents within 15 school days of the parents' correspondence.
- Once the Headmaster/Head of Prep School is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and the parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Headmaster/Head of Prep School will give reasons for their decision.
- A written record of all Stage 2 complaints is retained along with any resulting actions that were taken.

- If the parents are still not satisfied that a matter has been resolved satisfactorily, they may proceed to Stage 3 of this Policy.
- Complaints about the Headmaster should bypass Stage 2 and should be made directly to the Chair of Governors by emailing

gov.admin@stcolumbascollege.org

The Chair will utilise the panel process described below and liaise with the Deputy Head or Head of Prep where necessary. Complaints levelled at the Head of the Prep School are to be made in writing to the Headmaster.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If, following a failure to reach a resolution under Stage 2, parents wish to invoke Stage 3, they should write to the Clerk to the Governors at the School, asking them to refer the complaint to a Panel. At the request of the Clerk, the Chair of Governors will convene the Panel and refer the complaint to it.
- The Chair of Governors will consider whether any particular perspective or expertise will be helpful amongst Panel members and will, to the extent practically possible, take this into account when appointing Panel members. If the parent(s) feel that a particular perspective or expertise would be beneficial, they should raise this in their initial request for a panel hearing.
- The Board of Governors will nominate three individuals to form the Complaint Panel, who should not include any Governors who may be directly involved in the issue. One of the three, under current Independent Schools Standards Regulations (ISSR) guidelines, must be independent of the management and governance of the College. The Chair of Governors will appoint one of the three panel members to act as ‘Chair.’ The panel Chair may or may not be the Chair of Governors.
- The clerk to the Panel (the “Clerk”) will deal with administrative issues prior to the panel hearing. The Clerk will normally be the Clerk to the Governing Body.
- A hearing will be scheduled to take place as soon as practical and normally within 25 school days of receipt of the latest correspondence from the parents. If, despite the best efforts of the College personnel, a hearing cannot be arranged within this time period, the Clerk will write to the parents before the expiry of the 25-school day period setting out the likely timeframe for the hearing. The hearing will normally be held at St Columba’s College. Alternatively, the Panel Chair will consider whether it may be appropriate for the hearing to be held remotely by video conference.
- The parents should supply copies of their previous written complaints to the Headmaster at Stage 2 and any other documentation they may wish to rely on to the Clerk for circulation to all parties not more than 7 days after the date of notification of the hearing. Documentation must be relevant to those matters set out in the complaint.
- The Clerk will request copies of statements and supporting/ background documentation from the College, and this will be provided to parents at least 10 school days before the hearing.
- 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 shall be supplied to the Clerk at least 5 school days prior to the hearing, for circulation to all parties.

- The Clerk to the Governors will record in writing the Complaint Panel's findings and recommendations and give a copy to the complainant, the Headmaster and, where relevant, the individual about whom the complaint was levelled.
- The decision of the panel will be final and binding on the College. The Complaint Panel will aim to reach a final decision on the complaint and recommend any appropriate action as quickly as possible, normally within 7 working days.
- The findings of the panel will be retained on record and any information regarding action taken as a result of the Complaint. These are made available on the school premises for referral and inspection.
- The full Board of Governors will be informed **by the Chair** that a Complaint Hearing has taken place. The Clerk to the Governors will communicate in writing to the appellant the outcome, stating that, when a complaint is not upheld, there is no right to appeal.

If the complaint concerns a Child Protection issue or involves an allegation of abuse by a member of the College, then in the Senior School, the Deputy Head or the DSL (Designated Senior Lead), will manage the matter and in the case of Prep School, its DSL, the Pastoral Deputy Head will take this responsibility. The Headmaster will be informed immediately of such an allegation against a member of staff.

The Headmaster will be informed of all complaints and their outcome.

In accordance with the Regulatory Requirements for the Provision of Information (DCSF Standard 6, para. 6(j)) the number of complaints registered requiring enactment of the formal procedure (see below) during the preceding College year will be made available on request. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept strictly confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act, as amended, requests access to them.

Training

The Headmaster will remind all staff from time to time of the procedures and records required to be undertaken according to this policy. The Clerk to the Governors will arrange training as necessary, in consultations with the Chair, for members of the Board of Governors who arbitrate on complaints.

Monitoring and Review

The Headmaster is responsible for monitoring the working of the complaints procedures and for refining its application .

The Headmaster will review the system annually and can propose changes to the Board of Governors following consultation with the staff and governors.

The Board of Governors is responsible for changes to the policy and procedures.

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Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Written complaints about the fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days. The record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request.

Complaints Record

Academic Year	Senior School	Prep School
2019-2020	One	None
2020-2021	One	One
2021-2022	One	None
2022-2023	None	None
2023-2024	Five	Three
2024-2025	Eleven	Three

Contact Points for Complaints

The following seeks to provide guidance to which member of staff is best placed to receive concerns and ultimately any formal letter of complaint, so that the issue may be responded to appropriately and as quickly as possible.

Please note: if in any doubt regarding who is the most appropriate person to contact then direct the query, in the case of the Prep School, to the Head of Prep and in the case of the Senior School, the Deputy Head.

Academic Issues

Any academic concern which relates to a specific subject should be directed in the first instance to the student's current subject teacher. Referral beyond this point would be to the relevant Subject Leaders in the Prep School and to the relevant Subject Leaders in the Senior School.

Pastoral Issues

Where concerns relate to the general well-being of the student, they are to be referred to his/her tutor in the first instance.

Referral beyond this point would be to the Deputy Head for matters relating to the Prep and to the Heads of House in the Senior School.

Where the issue centres around academic issues and involves a number of subjects, the matter is to be considered one which needs pastoral intervention and should be referred as follows:

Prep School (including Early Years)

Head of Prep	Mr McCann
Prep Deputy Head (Pastoral)	Mr Boland
Prep Deputy Head (Academic)	Mrs Maton

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Senior School

Form 1 and New Student Coordinator	Mr Batten
Sixth Form	Mr Waters (Head of Sixth Form)
Safeguarding	Mr Livesey (DSL)

House Issues

Charles House	Mr Murphy (Head of House)
Guertin House	Ms Treacy (Head of House)
Joseph House	Mr Sheils (Head of House)
Martin House	Mr Lowles (Head of House)
McClancy House	Mr Pinto (Head of House)
Stanislaus House	Mrs De Vos (Head of House)

Senior School

Curriculum & Timetabling	Ms Cronin (Assistant Head – Director of Studies)
Learning Needs	Mrs Dubberley (Head of Learning Needs)
Health and Medical Needs	Ms Morais (College Nurse)
Pastoral Curriculum	Mr Livesey (Assistant Head)
Extra & Extended Activities	Mr Livesey (Assistant Head)
Catering, Facilities, Grounds, Coaches, Health & Safety	Ms Freeman (Bursar)
Trips & Visits	Mr Tatham (Assistant Head)
Discipline Matters/ General issues or aspects of Senior School not covered by the above	Mrs Marson (Deputy Head)

Prep School

Early Years Foundation Stage	Miss Walsh
Health and Medical Needs	Ms Morais (College Nurse)
Extra & Extended Activities	Mr Turpin (Activities Coordinator)
Catering, Facilities, Grounds, Coaches, Health & Safety	Ms Freeman (Bursar)
General issues or aspects of Prep School life not covered by the above	Mr McCann (Head of Prep)

Further Information

Written records of complaints, and any action taken will be kept for at least 7 calendar years after completion of the complaints procedure and will be available to ISI and Ofsted inspectors on request.

Confidentiality and Access

The correspondence, statements, other materials, and individual records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except in those circumstances where the Secretary of State or an Inspection Team require access in accordance with 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act.

Ofsted and ISI (Independent Schools' Inspectorate)

Parents may make a complaint to OFSTED and/or ISI should they wish to do so – contact details are given below. We would hope however that parents would feel able to address complaints to the College in the first instance.

Contact details for OFSTED

RHS Day Care Registration

RHS Early Years Provision

Address: OFSTED, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester,

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Telephone: 0300 123 1231 (general enquiries)

Contact Details for Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)

Address: ISI, 1st Floor, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

Website: www.isi.net

Email: info@isi.net

Telephone: 0207 600 0100

References:

Independent School Standards Regulations for Inspection (most current)

Statutory Framework for EYFS 2024

Appendix 1

The structure of the Complaint Meeting will be as follows:

- The Chair of the Complaint Panel will welcome the appellant and the representative(s) of the College.
- The Chair will check that all parties have received and read all previously distributed submissions.
- If significant additional material is presented at the Hearing, then the Hearing may be suspended for an appropriate amount of time to give all participants the opportunity to read and understand it.
- The Chair will then invite the appellant to present her or his case
- The College may ask questions
- The Panel may ask questions
- The Chair will then invite the College to present its case
- The appellant may ask questions
- The Panel may ask questions
- The appellant will then sum up his or her case without adding anything new
- The College will then sum up its case without adding anything new
- The appellant and the representatives of the College will then leave the hearing.
- The Panel will then deliberate to reach a decision.