



# Complaints Procedure

## Mission Statement

We are a Catholic College dedicated to the education and development of the whole person and supporting all students to realise their full potential. As an outstanding learning organisation SJR will have a strong sense of purpose and a commitment to shared values within a Christian community. We will establish a unique, safe and challenging environment where every individual is valued, talents are recognised and nurtured, achievements are celebrated and dedication is rewarded. To achieve this as a community we will:

- Welcome all students who are happy to be educated within a Christian environment
- Value the uniqueness and dignity of each individual
- Deliver the highest standards of teaching and learning
- All show a commitment to our work, to the Christian values of the College and to the safety of all in our community
- Provide equality of opportunity, with mutual respect and positive encouragement
- Build and further develop local, national and international partnerships

Core values in daily life at St John Rigby College are expressed as:

- Genuine concern for others
- Support for and challenge of one another
- High standards and expectations
- Consistency and perseverance
- Recognition of talents, progress and achievements.

## 1. Purpose of the Complaints Procedure

This procedure aims to reassure students, parents and others with an interest in the College that:

- Any concerns about or complaint against the College will be dealt with in a fair, open and responsive way, with the aim of achieving a speedy and satisfactory resolution; and
- The College recognises that a willingness to listen to questions and criticism and to respond positively, can lead to improvements in College practices and provision for students.

## 2. Scope of the Procedure

- 2.1 A complaint is defined as a clear statement of dissatisfaction about any specified aspect of the College's work.
- 2.2 This procedure deals with specified day-to day concerns about or complaints against the management and/or operation of the College which fall outside the scope of the following procedures:
- Complaints which have an alternative avenue of appeal: e.g. exclusion
  - Serious complaints which must be dealt with by specific procedures e.g. safeguarding, allegations of criminal offences or those that are potentially staff disciplinary issues.
- 2.3 Complainants may be anyone e.g. students, parents, guardians, grandparents, neighbours of the College or anyone with an interest in the work of the College. The term "complainant" therefore is used throughout the procedure as a generic term.

- 2.4 Concerns, to be dealt with through 'informal procedures', can be raised by telephone, email, letter or in person. The College prefers these to be raised with the Office Manager but recognises that they can be raised directly with any relevant member of staff who may be known to the complainant.
- 2.5 Formal complaints should be made in writing and should be addressed to the Principal.

### 3. General

- 3.1 Records of all conversations and meetings with complainants to resolve concerns or complaints will be kept. To help prevent recurring complaints, copies of correspondence and notes will be kept on file by the College, separately from individual student records.
- 3.2 If at any stage in the procedure it becomes apparent that the complaint falls outside of this general complaints procedure, complainants will be informed.
- 3.3 There may be rare occasions when, despite all the stages of the procedure having been followed, a complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant seeks to re-open the same issue, the College reserves the right to inform him/ her in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed.

### 4. Informal Concerns

- 4.1 A complainant may raise a concern directly with College staff without any formality. At this stage, it may be unclear whether the complainant is making a complaint, seeking information or has misunderstood a situation. In any event, the College aims to resolve the concern at this point in a speedy and effective way.
- 4.2 However, if the concern is not resolved immediately, the opportunity to discuss the matter with an appropriate member of staff will be given e.g. Senior Tutor, Assistant Principal or relevant Vice Principal.
- 4.3 The member of staff will inform their line manager and will discuss the issue with the complainant and those involved in College, with the aim of resolving the concern as soon as possible. The complainant will be informed of the outcome of the investigation and what action, if any, the College proposes to take.
- 4.4 If the informal process has been exhausted and no satisfactory solution has been found, the complainant will be asked by the member of staff dealing with the complaint whether (s)he wishes the complaint to be considered formally.
- 4.5 If wishing to proceed with the complaint, the complainant will be invited to put the complaint in writing to the Principal, using the form attached at Appendix 1. The form should be sent to the Principal within **ten College days**.

### 5. Formal Complaints: Referral to Principal (or the Chair of Governors) for further investigation

- 5.1 Where the complaint has been addressed by the Principal at the informal stage, the formal complaint will be heard by the Chair of Governors. Where another staff member has addressed the informal concern, the formal complaint will be heard by the Principal.
- 5.2 The Principal (or Chair of Governors) will acknowledge the written complaint within **three College days** of receipt and provide an opportunity to meet the complainant to discuss the complaint.
- 5.3 The Principal (or Chair of Governors) will investigate the complaint and a written response will normally be made within **ten College days** of acknowledgement of the complaint. If this is not possible, a letter will be sent explaining the reason for the delay and providing a revised target date.
- 5.4 The written response will include full reasons for the conclusions reached by the Principal (or Chair of Governors) and what action, if any, the College proposes to take to resolve the matter. Note: Where a complaint is found to have been made maliciously, this can lead to the application of the College's disciplinary procedures for students.
- 5.5 If the complainant still remains dissatisfied, (s)he will be advised that, in order to progress the complaint further, (s)he must notify the Clerk to the Governing Body in writing **within ten College days**, copying the original complaint form.

5.6 The Clerk will then inform the Chair of Governors (where the formal complaint has been addressed by the Principal) and ensure that the complainant is offered the opportunity of taking the complaint to the Governors' Complaints Panel.

## **6. Review by the Governors' Complaints Panel**

6.1 Complaints only rarely reach this level. However, when the need arises, the Governors' Complaints Panel (established according to the suggested composition detailed in Appendix 2 attached) will consider complaints at this stage.

6.2 A written acknowledgement of the complaint and the request for it to be heard by a panel of Governors will be sent to the complainant by the Clerk to the Governors **within five College days**.

6.3 The letter will inform the complainant that the complaint will be heard by the Governors' Complaints Panel (GCP) within **twenty College days** of receiving the complaint. It will also inform the complainant of the right to submit any further documents other than the complaint form and that these must be made available to the Clerk to the Governors within **five College days** of receipt of the acknowledgement letter. The right to call witnesses to the meeting, subject to the approval of the Chair of the GCP, and the right of the parent to be accompanied by another family member will also be explained in the letter.

6.4 The Clerk to the Governors will send a copy of the letter of acknowledgement of the complaint to the Chair of Governors and/ or the Principal and request a written report in response to the complaint to the GCP within **five College days** of receipt of the letter. The right to call witnesses, subject to the approval of the Chair, will also be explained.

6.5 The Clerk to the Governors will then convene a GCP meeting, having consulted with all parties about convenient times. The date, time and venue for the meeting will then be confirmed at least **five College days** in advance.

6.6 The names of all parties and witnesses (if any) to attend the meeting and all relevant documents to be referred to at the meeting will also be provided by the Chair of the GCP to: the complainant; the Chair of Governors and/ or Principal and each panel member. This will be provided as soon as possible and, in any event, at least **five College days** prior to the meeting.

6.7 The meeting will be minuted and will be held following the procedures for hearing a complaint detailed in Appendix 3.

6.8 A written decision will be sent to both the complainant and the Chair of Governors and/ or Principal by the Chair of the GCP within **ten College days** of the hearing.

6.9 The letter will explain that the decision of the Governors' Complaints Panel is final.

## **7. Continuous Improvement**

The College will keep a record of any complaint received and of the resulting correspondence. We will use this information as part of our attempt to improve the quality of service and provision which we offer.

## **8. Equality and Diversity**

Records of complaints and their outcomes are reported to the College Management Team and the Quality & Standards Committee of the Governing Body on an annual basis. Reports will include an analysis of gender, race, disability and learning difficulty based on the information which complainants, if students of the College, provided on enrolment.



## **Appendix 2**

### **Composition of the Governors' Complaints Panel**

The Governors' Complaints Panel (GCP) should consist of three members of the Governing Body. A Chair of the GCP should also be appointed.

The Governing Body may decide to appoint the three members annually, together with three reserves, designated in the order in which they would be called upon to stand, in order to ensure that three governors will be available to meet within the timescales. The Governing Body may wish to consider the advantages of having a parent governor as a member of the panel.

No member of the GCP should have had prior involvement with the complaint. As the Chair of the Governing Body may be involved in an earlier stage in the procedure (particularly where the complaint is about the Principal) it may be wise not to include the Chair as a member of the GCP to avoid any possible reference to the Chair being "tainted".

It is not considered appropriate for the Principal to be a member of the GCP. The role of the Principal would be to attend the panel hearing to give evidence and s/he may choose to invite staff directly involved in matters raised by the complainant (subject to the approval of the Chair of the GCP).

## **Appendix 3**

### **Governors' Complaints Panel (GCP) – Procedures for Hearing the Complaint**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of the meeting is to resolve the complaint and achieve a reconciliation between the College and the complainant.

The Chair of the GCP will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted.

Although the meeting will follow the structured order below, given potential sensitivities and anxieties, the Chair will endeavour to ensure that the proceedings are as informal as possible and that all parties are put at their ease.

The introduction of new information or witnesses, previously not notified to all parties, would be reason to adjourn the meeting so that everyone has time to consider and respond to the new information.

#### **Order of Meeting**

1. The Chair welcomes the complainant and introduces the GCP.
2. The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
3. The complainant explains the complaint, calling in witnesses if appropriate.
4. The GCP may question the complainant and witnesses.
5. The complainant retires from the meeting.
6. The Chair welcomes the Principal and the Chair of Governors (where the complaint has been addressed by the Chair of Governors at stage 2).
7. The Chair explains the purpose of the meeting, the procedure, and that all written evidence has been made available to all parties.
8. The Principal/ Chair of Governors present a response to the complaint, including action taken to address the complaint at stage 1 and 2 of the procedure and calling witnesses, if appropriate.
9. The GCP may question the Principal/ Chair of Governors.
10. The Principal and Chair of Governors retire from the meeting.
11. The complainant is invited back into the room to make a final statement, then retires.
12. The Principal, together with the Chair of Governors, where applicable, is invited back into the room to make a final statement, then retires.
13. The GCP considers the complaint and reaches a unanimous or majority decision. The GCP also decides what action (if any) to take to resolve the complaint and, if appropriate, recommends changes to ensure similar complaints are not made in future.
14. When a decision has been made, the Chair recalls the complainant, then the Principal and each is informed of the outcome and any action to be taken.
15. All outcomes are confirmed in writing to both parties in accordance with paragraphs 6.8 and 6.9 of the Complaints Procedure.