KINGSTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL

FOUNDED 1561

COMPLAINTS POLICY

This policy is available on the School website and on request from the School Office.

Kingston Grammar School prides itself on the quality of teaching and pastoral care provided to its students and we welcome suggestions and comments from parents, which may enable us to improve what we do.

We hope to expedite and resolve most concerns informally and appropriately and, in this way, avoid matters escalating to the status of a complaint. Usually, it will be most appropriate for parents to raise concerns in the first instance with their child's Form Tutor or Subject Teacher. In many cases this will enable the concern to be resolved straightaway to the parents' satisfaction.

If, however, parents do have a complaint they can expect it to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this policy including the Three-Stage Complaints Procedure set out below.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent of a student is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this policy. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

This policy may only be used by parents of current students.

This policy does not apply to complaints by parents of former students except where the complaint was initially raised whilst the student was still on the School roll or it relates to a review of a decision taken by the Head requiring removal of a student. This policy also does not apply to parents of prospective students. Nor does it apply to current, prospective or former students themselves.

Reviewed: September 2026
Review Date: September 2027
By S R Lehec, Head

At Kingston Grammar School we aim to:

- Take complaints seriously
- Respond to complaints within clear and reasonable timeframes and in a courteous and efficient manner
- Use any complaint as an opportunity to learn and thereby improve the School
- Take any action where appropriate.

The School will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the application of this policy.

Although the School endeavours to manage complaints in an open and transparent manner, parents should be aware that there may be circumstances which mean the School is unable to share complete details about how a complaint has been handled by the School, the evidence collated, steps taken in response or other related matters. This could be the case even when a complaint is upheld. For example, this may be because such information constitutes sensitive third-party data (for example belonging to a staff member, pupil or other parent), legal or regulatory requirements prohibit disclosure, or withholding information is in accordance with specific instructions from a statutory agency. This list is not exhaustive.

The Three-Stage Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- If parents have a complaint, they should contact the relevant Head of Year, Head of Department or one of the Assistant or Deputy Heads.
- The matter may be referred in the first instance to the relevant Form Tutor or Subject Teacher if deemed appropriate and they have not already had an opportunity to try and resolve the issue.
- Complaints made directly to an Assistant or Deputy Head may be referred to the Head of Year or Head of Department unless they deem it appropriate to deal with the matter themselves.
- The staff member concerned with resolving the complaint will make a written record of the complaint and the date on which it was received. The complaint will be investigated and the School will respond to the parents as soon as reasonably possible, usually within 10 working days.
- Any query or complaint relating to a financial matter should be sent in writing to the Director of Finance and Operations (DFO).

- If the complaint concerns a member of the School's Executive team (eg Assistant or Deputy Head, or DFO), then the complaint should be referred directly to the Head.
- If the complaint concerns the Head, the complaint should be referred directly to the Chair of Governors.
- We hope that in the vast majority of cases the complaint will be resolved informally to everyone's satisfaction at this stage.

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the complaint should be put in writing to the Head.
- The complaint should include full written details of the nature of the complaint, any relevant supporting documents, and details of any members of staff already spoken to.
- The Head may require further information from the parents to help clarify the scope and nature of their concerns.
- The Head may in some circumstances deem it appropriate to nominate a staff member to hear the complaint and manage the Stage 2 complaint process. The Head (or their nominee) will consider the complaint and decide the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head (or their nominee) will meet or speak to the parents within 10 working days from receipt of the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out. The Head (or their nominee) will determine who should carry out any further investigations, and this may be someone external to the school.
- Written records will be kept of all formal meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head (or their nominee) 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 the decision in writing, giving reasons for the decision. In most cases, this will be within 20 working days from receipt of the formal written complaint (or following the provision of any further clarificatory information about the complaint to the Head, if so requested).
- If the complaint concerns the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed as if the references to the Head (or their nominee) is to the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors to determine the complaint against the Head.
- We hope that parents will feel satisfied with the outcome or at least will understand the situation more fully and be assured that their complaint has been fully considered.

Stage 3 - Panel Hearing

3.1 Written Appeal

If parents are still not happy with the outcome, they may within 10 working days of receipt of the Stage 2 decision write to the Clerk to the Governing Body ("the Clerk") requesting an appeal hearing. The appeal letter should set out in full the grounds for the appeal; include copies of all documents parents wish to be considered or rely on; and state what action they wish to be substituted in place of the Stage 2 decision.

To the extent that parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking such action, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such request should be made to the Clerk in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered. In the event the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated (including to the extent applicable any extensions of time agreed), the School reserves the right to conclude the complaint process and not progress the matter to Stage 3.

Receipt of the appeal request will normally be acknowledged by the Clerk within 5 working days.

3.2 Required Removal and Exclusions

Appeals against permanent exclusions are dealt with under the School's Exclusions Policy.

Any complaint about a decision taken by the Head to impose a fixed period exclusion or to require the removal of a student will be governed by this Stage 3 of the School's Complaints Policy.

In such circumstances, the appeal must be requested no later than 5 working days from the date of the Head's decision.

There may be circumstances in which the School considers it necessary and appropriate to deviate from the Stage 3 procedure in the context of such appeals and the School will inform the parents of this.

The panel may only uphold the complaint and ask the Head to reconsider their decision if they consider having regard to the process followed by the Head that their decision was not a reasonable decision to have been taken.

3.3 The Panel

The Clerk will convene a panel of at least three members who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and who do not know the parents or their child, consisting of two Governors and a member who is independent of the management and running of the School. One member of the panel shall serve as panel Chair.

The Clerk will notify the parents and the Head (or other Stage 2 decision-taker) of the names of the panel members.

3.4 Notice of Appeal Hearing

A panel hearing will be scheduled to take place as soon as practicable, and normally within 20 working days of receipt of an appeal hearing request. The panel will not normally sit during School holidays.

The Clerk will give parents and the Head (or other Stage 2 decision-taker) not less than 5 working days' notice of the date, time and place of the meeting to hear the appeal, whether or not the parents have requested an oral hearing.

3.5 Prior to the Appeal Hearing

The panel will consider the complaint and will decide the appropriate course of action including any steps to be taken prior to the hearing, and timescales, as soon as practicable. The panel will have sole and full authority to determine the outcome of the appeal and all matters of procedure arising prior to or in the course of the appeal hearing whether or not provided for in this procedure.

The panel may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied by either or both parties in advance of the hearing, together with copies of relevant documents.

If either party has any additional information they would like the panel to consider, they should provide this to the Clerk no later than 7 working days in advance of the hearing. Any documentation which is submitted late may result in a delay in the panel reaching their decision.

Unless directed otherwise by the panel, all information and documentation supplied by either party will be shared with the other. In exceptional circumstances where disclosure of documents by the Head (or other Stage 2 decision-taker) will disclose information about other

students, in breach of their rights under the data protection act or for reasons of Child Protection and where redacting names would not be adequate, copies of these documents may be supplied to the panel only.

The Clerk will prepare a bundle of papers for transmission to the parents, the Head (or other Stage 2 decision-taker), and the panel members normally at least 5 working days prior to the hearing.

3.6 Attendance at Hearing

The parents may attend the appeal hearing and be accompanied by one other person, if they wish. The Head (or other Stage 2 decision-taker) is also entitled to be accompanied by one other person. In either case, this may be a relative, friend or work colleague. Legal representation will not be permitted, and the companion should not be a lawyer. The identity of any companions should be confirmed to the Clerk as soon as possible and no later than two working days before the hearing.

The panel may retain the services of a Clerk (usually the Clerk to the Governors), who may make written notes of the hearing, but shall take no part in deciding the appeal. The notes will not be verbatim but an accurate reflection of what was discussed.

3.7 Hearing procedure

The hearing shall take place in private, and everything said during its course shall be confidential. No recording may be made of the proceedings.

The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the panel.

Normally: the parent(s) and the Head will address the panel separately; the Panel may question either party but there will be no cross-examination by the parties themselves; neither party will be entitled to put before the panel any document which has not previously been submitted, unless the panel consents otherwise in exceptional circumstances; and the panel shall not usually hear witnesses unless there is no reasonable and fair alternative method of establishing a disputed fact.

If possible, the panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the panel will decide how it should be carried out, and if necessary, the panel hearing may be adjourned.

3.8 Outcome of the Hearing

After due consideration of the merits of the complaint and all the facts they consider relevant, the panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was reasonable and accordingly whether to:

- Dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part; or
- Uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part.

The Panel may also make recommendations for the School to consider. Stage 3 Panels cannot require that any financial compensation is paid to parents or otherwise obligate the School to take particular steps.

The panel Chair will record the findings and recommendations in writing, setting out the decision and the reasons for it. A copy of the findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Head (or other Stage 2 decision-taker) together with the notes of the hearing. These will normally be sent out within 10 working days of the panel hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). A copy of the findings and recommendations will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Head and Chair of Governors.

The panel may make its decision by a majority.

The panel's decision shall be final, shall be binding on both the parents and the Head and shall not be subject to any further appeal.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales.

It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 30 working days, with stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, completed within a further 20 working days.

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. This means that during School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff

absence, however deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis, and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay. The School expects parents to engage in the process in a reasonable, constructive and responsive manner to help ensure matters can be dealt with in a timely way and in line with the targets set out in this Procedure.

Record Keeping and Use of Personal Data

A written record will be kept of all complaints that are made whether they are resolved following a formal procedure or proceed to a panel hearing. A record will also be kept of any action taken by the School as a result of a complaint (regardless of whether or not a complaint is upheld).

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notices. When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of student
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision.

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's *Privacy Notice* and/or *Data Protection Policy*, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's *Data Protection Policy* and *Privacy Notice*.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its *Privacy Notice* and *Data Protection Policy*.

Confidentiality

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints are treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records are kept confidential except where disclosure is required by the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008. In addition, there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is required, for example where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (eg in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

Persistent correspondence

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this will be regarded by the School as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

Number of Complaints

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure in the preceding School year is available from the Clerk to the Governors by writing to:

Clerk of the Governors,
Kingston Grammar School
70 London Road, Kingston upon Thames, KT2 6PY.