
St Annes College Grammar School



Complaints Policy

Registered proprietor	St Annes College Ltd
Chair and principal	Miss Abigail Welsby
Approval	Approval by the proprietor body required
Policy date	September 2026
Effective from	27 th September 2026
Next review	September 2027 or sooner if requirements change

This policy gives parents and carers a fair route to raise a concern, make a formal complaint and request a panel hearing. It explains the timescales and how complaints about the Principal are handled without a conflict of interest.

1 Purpose

St Annes College Grammar School (SACGS) aims to resolve concerns fairly, promptly and at the lowest appropriate level. This procedure explains how parents and carers may raise informal concerns, formal complaints and requests for an independent panel hearing.

The registered proprietor is St Annes College Ltd. Miss Abigail Welsby is Principal and Chair and sole active member of the proprietor body. In this procedure, “the proprietor” means the company acting through its authorised arrangements; references to Miss Welsby describe her operational role. This distinction does not alter the independent route for a complaint about her. No person investigates, decides or controls the appointments in a complaint where their involvement creates an actual or apparent conflict of interest. The proprietor has delegated the specific alternative appointment and administration functions in sections 6 and 9 to the Vice Principal, with SENCO as fallback.

2 Legal and regulatory framework

This procedure has been prepared with regard to:

- Part 7 of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, particularly paragraph 33
- Part 6 of the Independent School Standards concerning information for parents and prospective parents
- the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026
- the Equality Act 2010
- UK data protection legislation

3 Scope

The statutory procedure applies to complaints from parents of pupils currently registered at the School. A complaint first raised while the pupil was registered may continue after the pupil leaves. The School may consider complaints from other people under an adapted route where appropriate. A concern is an expression of worry or doubt; a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about action or inaction. The School will not deny access to the formal process merely because a concern was initially described informally.

3.1 Matters considered under other procedures

Local authority decisions about EHCPs; staff grievances and disciplinary matters; whistleblowing; and complaints about services provided independently by another organisation may have separate routes. Safeguarding concerns and allegations against adults are acted upon immediately under the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. A pupil’s suspension or permanent exclusion has its own disciplinary review route, but a parent may also complain about the School’s handling, fairness or procedure through this complaints process, including the panel stage where applicable. We explain how any processes interact and do not allow one to remove the rights required by Part 7. Safeguarding enquiries take priority where simultaneous investigation might cause harm or prejudice an external process; remaining complaint issues are resumed when appropriate.

4 Principles

The School will:

- deal with complaints impartially, respectfully and without avoidable delay
- allow the complainant to complete all applicable stages of the procedure
- consider all relevant evidence and give reasons for decisions
- make reasonable adjustments for disability, communication needs or other relevant circumstances
- protect confidentiality as far as the law and a fair investigation permit
- keep the complainant informed if a published timescale cannot be met
- record formal complaints and use learning from them to improve practice

A complainant will not be disadvantaged because they have raised a concern or complaint in good faith. The School expects everyone involved to communicate respectfully and to allow the procedure a reasonable opportunity to work.

5 Making a complaint

Concerns should normally be raised as soon as possible. Formal complaints should ordinarily be made within three months of the incident or, where related incidents have occurred, within three months of the most recent incident. Complaints must be sent to the School Office, or if confidential to the Principal/Vice Principal by letter or email. Anyone who needs help to put a complaint in writing may contact the School Office. The School may record an oral complaint in writing, check the record with the complainant and then treat the agreed record as the formal complaint. A complaint received outside term time will normally be treated as received on the first full school day after the holiday. Any safeguarding concern will be acted upon immediately and will not wait until term resumes.

6 Roles

6.1 Complainant

The complainant should explain what happened, identify the matters they want considered, provide relevant information and say what outcome they are seeking. They should respond reasonably to requests for information and treat those involved with respect.

6.2 Complaints contacts

Miss Abigail Welsby, Principal and Chair of the proprietor body, receives and coordinates complaints that do not concern her and in which she has no conflict. She may acknowledge, maintain records and appoint a suitable investigator, but does not determine a complaint about her own conduct or a matter in which she was directly involved.

Mrs Andrea Burrell, Vice Principal and DSL, is the alternative confidential contact for complaints about Miss Welsby: andrea.burrell@sacgs.co.uk. Acting under the proprietor's delegation in this procedure, Mrs Burrell appoints an impartial person to investigate and determine Stage 2 and arranges Stage 3 appointments without seeking Miss Welsby's approval. If Mrs Burrell is unavailable, implicated or otherwise conflicted, Mrs Wendy Cottier-Brown, SENCO, performs these functions: wendy.cottier-brown@sacgs.co.uk. Neither contact may investigate or decide a complaint in which they have a material conflict.

6.3 Investigator

The person appointed to investigate will be impartial and will have had no material prior involvement in the matters complained about. The investigator may interview relevant people, consider documents and other evidence, keep an accurate record and prepare a report setting out the evidence, findings and any recommendations.

6.4 Proprietor

St Annes College Ltd is accountable for implementing Part 7, keeping records and acting on learning. Its authorised and unconflicted decision-makers act on its behalf. Because Miss Welsby is Chair and sole active member of the proprietor body, the alternative arrangements in sections 6.2 and 9 apply to a complaint about her. She takes no part in appointments, administration, investigation or determination of that complaint, except to provide her account and

evidence as a person complained about. If a proposed delegate has a conflict, an independent person is appointed through an unconflicted company-authorised arrangement.

6.5 Panel clerk and chair

The clerk arranges the Stage 3 hearing, circulates papers, supports fair procedure and records the hearing. The chair ensures that the hearing is orderly and fair, that each party can present their case and that the panel reaches findings and recommendations based on the evidence.

7 Stage 1 Informal resolution

The School will normally try to resolve a concern informally. It should be raised with the relevant member of staff, their line manager or the Principal. The School Office will help identify the appropriate person where necessary.

The School will normally acknowledge the concern within five school days and aim to provide a response within a further ten school days, from the point of acknowledgement. A meeting or telephone discussion may be offered where this would help resolution. If the concern is not resolved, or the complainant wishes to proceed formally, the complainant should write to the Principal under Stage 2. A complainant may ask to proceed directly to Stage 2 where informal resolution would be inappropriate.

8 Stage 2 Formal complaint

A formal complaint must be made in writing to the Principal unless it concerns the Principal, in which case section 9 applies. The complaint should include:

- the complainant's name and contact details
- the name of the pupil, where relevant
- a clear account of the complaint and relevant dates
- copies of relevant documents or other evidence
- the outcome sought

The Principal will record the date of receipt and will normally acknowledge the complaint within three school days. The Principal may investigate or appoint another suitable person to do so. The investigator may meet or speak with the complainant and other relevant people and may request further information. The School will normally provide a written Stage 2 decision within fifteen school days of receipt. The response will address the issues raised, explain the findings and identify any action the School proposes to take. Where the investigation cannot be completed within that period, the School will explain the reason and provide a revised date. If dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response, the complainant may request a Stage 3 panel hearing. The request must normally be made in writing to the complaints contact within ten school days of the Stage 2 response and should explain why the complainant remains dissatisfied.

9 Complaints about the Principal and proprietor

9.1 Non safeguarding complaints about the Principal

A complaint about the Principal must be sent to the Vice Principal at andrea.burrell@sacgs.co.uk, marked Private and Confidential Complaint about the Principal. The Vice Principal acknowledges and administers it without referring it to the Principal for approval. She appoints a suitably independent person with no material prior involvement to investigate and determine Stage 2. That person gives the Principal a fair chance to respond and issues a written decision. arranges any Stage 3 panel on behalf of the proprietor, with no member directly involved in the matters. If the Vice Principal is unavailable or conflicted, the SENCO at wendy.cottier-brown@sacgs.co.uk performs those functions. Where both are conflicted, an independent administrator is appointed under an unconflicted company-authorised arrangement.

9.2 Safeguarding concerns and allegations

An allegation or concern that the Principal has harmed or may pose a risk of harm to a child must be referred without delay directly to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where referring it within the School or to her would create a conflict of interest. Staff may contact the LADO directly; the DSL or, if unavailable or conflicted, the SENCO supports immediate safeguarding action and referral. No internal investigation precedes LADO advice. These steps

follow Part Four of KCSIE 2026 and the School's safeguarding policy. The complaints process is paused or adapted only so far as necessary to protect the child and avoid prejudicing agency enquiries; outstanding issues return to this procedure when appropriate.

10 Stage 3 Panel hearing

10.1 Appointment and arrangements

The Stage 3 panel is appointed by or on behalf of St Annes College Ltd and has at least three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one is independent of the management and running of the School. Where the complaint concerns the Principal, the Vice-Principal or the fallback contact arranges the panel under the authority described in sections 6 and 9, without the Principal's involvement. A clerk organises the hearing.

The clerk normally acknowledges the request within three school days and aims to convene the hearing within twenty school days, giving reasonable notice. If delayed, the clerk explains why and gives a revised date. Reasonable hearing dates are offered. If a complainant declines them without good reason or does not attend, the panel may proceed on the papers after offering an opportunity for written representations. The clerk normally circulates documents at least five school days before the hearing; late evidence is considered only where fair.

10.2 Attendance and adjustments

The hearing is private. The complainant may attend and be accompanied by one other person. Legal representation is not normally necessary but may be permitted where fair. Reasonable adjustments are made. Recording requires advance agreement, including consideration of disability and confidentiality.

10.3 Conduct

The chair gives both sides a reasonable opportunity to present and answer the case, ask or answer relevant questions and respond to evidence. The panel may hear witnesses where useful. It considers the evidence privately and may uphold a complaint fully or partly or dismiss it, and make recommendations.

10.4 Findings and recommendations

Written findings and recommendations are provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy is available on the School premises for inspection by the proprietor and Principal as required by paragraph 33; safeguarding and employment confidentiality is managed lawfully. The clerk normally sends the decision within ten school days of the hearing. This completes the internal procedure.

11 Early Years Foundation Stage complaints

Written complaints concerning the School's fulfilment of the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements will be investigated and the complainant will be notified of the outcome within twenty eight days of receipt. The School will keep a written record of each such complaint and its outcome and will make the record available to Ofsted or the Independent Schools Inspectorate on request. Parents and carers of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage may also contact Ofsted and, where applicable, the Independent Schools Inspectorate if they believe the School is not meeting the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements. Current contact details are available through the organisations' official websites. Records of written Early Years Foundation Stage complaints will be retained for at least three years from the date the complaint was made, or longer where the School's retention schedule or another legal requirement applies.

12 External referral after the School procedure

If the complainant believes that the School has not complied with the Independent School Standards or has not followed its published complaints procedure, they may raise the matter with the Department for Education after completing the School's procedure. Information is available at www.gov.uk/complain-about-school. The Department for Education does not normally reconsider the merits of a complaint simply because the complainant disagrees with the School's decision. It may consider whether the School has met the applicable standards and followed its procedure. Nothing in this procedure prevents a person from contacting the police, children's social care, the Local Authority Designated Officer, Ofsted or another appropriate authority where the matter falls within that body's functions.

13 Unreasonable or persistent conduct

The School will not treat a complainant as unreasonable merely because they are persistent, determined or dissatisfied. It may, however, manage contact where behaviour becomes abusive, threatening, harassing, excessively repetitive or otherwise disproportionate and materially obstructs the proper consideration of the complaint or the School's work. Before restricting communication, the School will normally:

- confirm what has been considered and the School's position
- identify any part of the procedure that remains available
- warn the complainant about the behaviour causing concern
- explain the proposed communication arrangements and how long they will apply

Proportionate arrangements may include a single point of contact, communication in writing only, reasonable limits on frequency or declining to respond to points already answered. New and materially different complaints will still be considered. Threats, harassment, violence or other potentially criminal conduct may be reported to the police. Access to the premises may be restricted where this is necessary and lawful to protect pupils, staff or visitors.

14 Duplicate and campaign complaints

Where the School receives a complaint about a matter already considered under this procedure, it will decide whether the new complaint raises materially new evidence or issues. If it does not, the School may confirm that the internal procedure is complete and provide the appropriate external referral information. Where many substantially identical complaints are received, the School may issue a common response or publish a response that does not identify individuals. Parents of current pupils retain the right to have any distinct complaint concerning their own child considered under this procedure.

15 Records and confidentiality

The School will keep a written record of every formal complaint, including:

- the issues raised and relevant correspondence
- whether the complaint was resolved following the formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing
- the findings, outcome and action taken by the School, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld
- the dates on which each stage was completed

Complaint correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except where access is required by the Secretary of State, a body conducting an inspection, or otherwise required or permitted by law. Information will be shared only with those who need it to investigate, decide, regulate or act on the complaint. A person making a data protection request is not automatically entitled to the complete complaint file. Requests will be considered under UK data protection legislation, taking account of confidentiality, legal privilege and the rights of other people. Records will be stored securely and retained in accordance with the School's records retention schedule. Safeguarding and personnel records will be managed under the applicable separate retention requirements.

16 Monitoring and learning

The Principal maintains the general complaints register. Formal complaints about the Principal are administered separately by the Vice Principal or the unconflicted fallback, with records retained for the company's compliance through access arrangements that do not give the person complained about control of the investigation. The panel chair or independent administrator confirms completion. The proprietor reviews themes at least termly through an appropriately confidential report and ensures remedial action.

The School makes available to parents and prospective parents the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure in the preceding school year, as required by Part 6 of the Independent School Standards. This is a count of Stage 2 formal complaints, whether resolved there or advanced to Stage 3.

17 Availability and review

This procedure is available on the School website and will be provided to parents and prospective parents on request. It is available in an alternative format where requested. The proprietor will review the procedure annually

and sooner following a relevant legal, regulatory or organisational change or where learning from a complaint shows that amendment is needed.

18 Related policies

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Low Level Concerns Policy and Staff Code of Conduct
- Admissions Policy
- Behaviour and Exclusions Policy
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Staff Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures
- Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices
- Records Retention Schedule

19 Contact details

General complaint: Miss Abigail Welsby, Principal and Chair of the proprietor body, awelsby@sacgs.co.uk .

Complaint about the Principal: Mrs Andrea Burrell, Vice Principal and DSL, andrea.burrell@sacgs.co.uk .

Fallback if the Vice Principal is unavailable or conflicted: Mrs Wendy Cottier-Brown, SENCO, wendy.cottier-brown@sacgs.co.uk .

Safeguarding allegation about the Principal where internal referral presents a conflict: report directly to the Lancashire LADO using the current Lancashire County Council contact details. For immediate danger call 999.

Department for Education: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school . Independent Schools Inspectorate: www.isi.net .

Ofsted: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted .