# Parent Concerns and Complaints Policy

Effective from: August 2025
Last reviewed: August 2026
Next review due: August 2027

KING'S COLLEGE SCHOOL
PANAMA

# 1. Purpose

King's College School Panama is committed to providing an outstanding standard of education, care and service to families. Open communication between school and home is an important part of this.

We recognise that, from time to time, parents may have concerns or may feel that something has not gone as it should. Parents should feel able to raise these matters with the school. Doing so will not adversely affect their child's education, progress, opportunities or standing within the school.

The purpose of this policy is to make sure concerns are heard, understood and dealt with fairly, promptly and at the appropriate level.

Wherever possible, we want concerns to be resolved through constructive discussion between parents and the members of staff closest to the issue. Where this does not resolve the matter, the policy provides a clear formal process and, ultimately, access to an independent complaints panel.

The school will listen carefully to concerns and use feedback to improve where appropriate. At the same time, responsibility for educational, staffing, safeguarding and operational decisions remains with the school. When considering a complaint, decisions will be based on the available evidence, the interests of pupils, the school's professional judgement and its legal and regulatory responsibilities.

# 2. Regulatory Framework

This policy is designed to meet the British Schools Overseas Standards relating to the handling of complaints and operates within the legal and regulatory framework applicable to King's College School Panama in the Republic of Panama.

It also reflects the governance requirements of Inspired Education.

Nothing in this policy removes or limits any right that a parent or guardian may have under Panamanian law to raise a matter with a competent regulatory or public authority.

This policy is published on the school website and is available to parents and guardians on request.

# 3. Scope

This policy applies to concerns and complaints raised by parents or legal guardians of current pupils and, where relevant, former pupils.

Separate procedures apply to:

- safeguarding or child protection allegations;
- allegations against members of staff that meet a safeguarding threshold;
- pupil disciplinary matters where a separate review or appeal procedure exists;

- admissions decisions where a separate process applies;
- examination appeals or malpractice matters governed by examination or awarding-body procedures;
- employment matters;
- data protection matters where a separate statutory process applies.

Where a concern raises a safeguarding or child welfare issue, safeguarding procedures take precedence and the Designated Safeguarding Lead will be informed immediately.

The school may determine the appropriate procedure where a matter falls across more than one policy.

## 4. Guiding Principles

Concerns and complaints will be handled with:

- fairness and impartiality;
- appropriate urgency;
- proportionate investigation;
- respectful and professional communication;
- appropriate confidentiality;
- consideration of the available evidence;
- protection of the interests and welfare of pupils;
- no retaliation or disadvantage arising from a parent making a complaint.

The purpose of the process is to understand what happened, determine whether the school acted appropriately and identify any action that may be required.

A complaint being made does not mean that it will be upheld, nor does the number of people supporting a particular position determine the outcome. Where several families raise the same concern, the extent of that concern will be taken seriously, but findings and decisions will be based on the evidence and circumstances of the matter.

## 5. Concerns and Complaints

For the purposes of this policy:

**Concern**

A concern is an expression of dissatisfaction, uncertainty or worry which can normally be considered and, where possible, resolved informally.

**Formal complaint**

A formal complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the school's actions, decisions, policies or failure to act which remains unresolved following Stage 1, or which the school determines should proceed directly to formal investigation because of its seriousness or complexity.

The format of a communication does not determine its stage.

A concern submitted in a formal letter or detailed email may still be considered at Stage 1. Equally, the school may decide that a matter needs to move immediately to Stage 2 where informal resolution would be inappropriate.

## 6. Raising Concerns Early

Parents are encouraged to raise concerns as soon as reasonably possible after an issue occurs.

In the first instance, the appropriate contact will normally be:

- the class teacher or Form Tutor;
- the relevant Head of Phase or Middle/Senior Leader; or
- a member of the Senior Leadership Team where appropriate.

Issues involving a particular child are usually best raised directly by that child's parent or guardian. This allows the school to establish the facts promptly and discuss confidential information directly with the family concerned.

Parents should not feel that an individual concern needs to wait for a wider class or parent-group discussion.

## 7. Collective Concerns and Complaints

The school recognises that an issue may affect more than one child or family and parents may therefore raise a shared concern collectively.

Where parents wish to do so:

- the shared concern should be clearly identified;
- the parents participating in a formal Stage 2 collective complaint should be identifiable;
- one parent should normally be nominated as the principal point of contact;
- the school may communicate through that representative where appropriate.

Where a person states that they are writing "on behalf of" a wider group of parents, the school may ask for reasonable confirmation of which parents wish to be represented.

Where that information is not provided, the school will normally treat the communication as coming from the identified sender rather than assume that it represents all families within a class, year group or school.

The number of parents supporting a concern may provide useful context, but it does not by itself establish whether the concern is substantiated or determine the action the school should take.

Where a collective concern includes matters relating to individual children, the school may separate those issues from the collective complaint and deal with them confidentially with the relevant families.

## 8. Anonymous Concerns

The school will not ignore information simply because it is provided anonymously.

Anonymous information will be considered on its merits, particularly where it raises concerns relating to:

- safeguarding or child welfare;
- health and safety;
- potential illegality;
- serious misconduct;
- regulatory compliance;
- other significant risks to pupils or the school community.

However, anonymous correspondence will not normally proceed through Stages 1 to 3 as a formal complaint because there is no identifiable complainant with whom the school can clarify the matters raised, communicate an outcome or operate an appeal process.

Where an anonymous communication claims to represent a number or group of parents, the school will not treat those parents as complainants unless their participation can reasonably be established.

Nothing in this section prevents the school from investigating an anonymous allegation where it considers investigation appropriate.

## 9. Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Most concerns should first be considered through Stage 1.

The member of staff receiving the concern will seek to:

- listen to and understand the issue;
- clarify relevant facts where necessary;
- consider what has already happened;
- establish what the parent is seeking;
- determine whether any immediate action is required;
- seek an appropriate resolution.

Stage 1 may involve one or more conversations, meetings, observations or enquiries. It is a process of informal resolution and is not necessarily concluded by a single meeting or response.

Concerns will normally be acknowledged within two working days.

The school will aim to resolve Stage 1 concerns within ten working days where possible.

Where a matter reasonably requires a longer period of observation, investigation or discussion, the school will inform the parent and provide an appropriate revised timeframe.

At the conclusion of Stage 1, the school will make clear whether it considers the informal process complete.

If the parent remains dissatisfied after Stage 1 has concluded, they may proceed to Stage 2.

## 10. Stage 2: Formal Written Complaint

If Stage 1 has not resolved the matter to the parent's satisfaction, the parent may submit a formal written complaint to the Head of School.

A Stage 2 complaint should, so far as reasonably possible, state:

- the name of the complainant;
- the pupil or pupils concerned and the complainant's relationship to them;
- the nature of the complaint;
- the relevant facts and, where possible, dates or events;
- what has already taken place at Stage 1;
- why the parent remains dissatisfied; and
- the outcome being sought.

The purpose of these requirements is to ensure that the school understands clearly what it is being asked to investigate.

Parents will not be disadvantaged because they are unfamiliar with formal complaints procedures. Where necessary, the school will provide reasonable assistance to clarify the complaint.

The school will acknowledge a Stage 2 complaint within three working days.

The Head of School will either investigate the complaint or appoint an appropriately senior person who can investigate it fairly.

The investigation may include:

- meeting the complainant;
- meeting relevant staff;
- speaking with witnesses where appropriate;
- reviewing correspondence or other documentation;
- reviewing relevant school records or systems;
- observing practice where relevant;

- seeking further information from the complainant.

Parents may be accompanied at a formal meeting by one adult adviser or companion.

A written Stage 2 outcome will normally be provided within ten working days of acknowledgement.

Where the complexity of the matter means that this is not reasonably possible, the parent will be informed of the reason and given a revised date for the outcome.

## 11. Complaints Involving the Head of School

Where a complaint concerns the conduct of the Head of School, or where the Head of School has had such significant prior involvement that it would not be appropriate for them to determine the Stage 2 complaint, the matter will be referred to an appropriate Inspired Education regional or governance representative.

That person may investigate the complaint themselves or appoint an appropriate person with no material prior involvement.

No person who determines a Stage 2 complaint may subsequently sit on a Stage 3 panel considering the same matter.

## 12. Stage 2 Outcomes

The written outcome will explain:

- the matters considered;
- the findings reached;
- the reasons for those findings, as far as confidentiality permits;
- whether the complaint is upheld, partially upheld or not upheld;
- any action the school considers appropriate.

Possible action may include:

- clarification or explanation;
- an apology where appropriate;
- changes to a process or practice;
- further monitoring;
- staff guidance or development;
- review of a policy or procedure;
- another proportionate response.

The school will not disclose confidential information relating to other pupils, families or members of staff simply because it forms part of a complaint.

The outcome sought by a complainant will be considered, but the school is not required to implement a particular remedy solely because it has been requested.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may proceed to Stage 3.

## 13. Stage 3: Complaints Panel

A parent who remains dissatisfied with the Stage 2 outcome may request a Stage 3 hearing.

The request should normally be made in writing within five working days of receiving the Stage 2 decision and should explain:

- why the parent remains dissatisfied;
- any aspect of the Stage 2 decision they wish the Panel to reconsider;
- the outcome they are seeking.

A request received outside this timeframe may still be considered where there is a reasonable explanation for the delay or where it would otherwise be fair to do so.

A Complaints Panel will normally be convened within fifteen working days of the Stage 3 request.

### Panel composition

The Panel will consist of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters forming the complaint or in reaching the Stage 2 decision.

At least one member will be independent of the management and running of King's College School Panama.

The Panel would normally be drawn from Inspired Education regional or governance representatives, appropriately experienced senior leaders from other Inspired Education schools, or other suitably qualified independent persons.

An individual from another Inspired Education school may fulfil the independent-member requirement provided that they have no managerial responsibility for King's College School Panama, no connection with the complaint and are able to act impartially.

A current employee of King's College School Panama would not normally sit on a Stage 3 Panel.

Panel members will be appointed on behalf of the proprietor through Inspired Education governance.

The complainant may attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one adult adviser or companion.

### Role of the Panel

The Panel will consider the complaint, the Stage 2 investigation and outcome, the parent's reasons for remaining dissatisfied and the relevant evidence.

In reaching its own findings, the Panel will consider:

- the original complaint;
- the Stage 2 investigation and outcome;
- the parent's grounds for remaining dissatisfied;
- relevant documentary or other evidence;
- whether the complaint was considered fairly;
- whether relevant evidence was appropriately considered;
- whether the conclusions reached were reasonable;
- any significant new evidence that could not reasonably have been provided earlier.

The Panel will make clear findings and, where appropriate, recommendations.

It is not normally the purpose of Stage 3 to introduce wholly new and unrelated complaints. New matters may be referred to Stage 1 or Stage 2 as appropriate.

The Panel's written decision will normally be issued within seven working days of the hearing.

The written decision will include the Panel's findings, any recommendations and the reasons for those findings.

A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations will be:

- provided to the complainant;
- where relevant, provided to the person complained about; and
- made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Head of School.

The Panel's decision represents the conclusion of the school's internal complaints procedure.

## 14. Complaints Raised Directly with Inspired Education

Where a parent sends a complaint directly to Inspired Education without first completing the school's published complaints procedure, the matter will normally be referred to the appropriate stage of this policy for consideration by the school.

Inspired Education may determine that direct regional or governance involvement is appropriate where, for example:

- the complaint concerns the Head of School;
- there is a potential conflict of interest;
- the complaint raises serious safeguarding or misconduct concerns;
- there is another compelling reason why local consideration would be inappropriate.

Submitting a concern simultaneously to several members of the school or Inspired Education does not automatically change the stage of the complaints procedure.

## 15. Safeguarding and Child Welfare

Any complaint which raises a safeguarding or child-protection concern will be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

The Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy will take precedence where appropriate.

External agencies may be involved where required.

Complaints-policy timescales may be varied or suspended where necessary to protect a child or avoid interfering with another investigation.

The welfare of the child will always take priority.

## 16. Early Years

Concerns relating to children in Early Years will be treated with particular regard to the age and developmental needs of the children concerned.

Concerns about supervision, care, toileting, welfare or other matters affecting an individual child should be raised promptly wherever possible so that the school can respond while the circumstances are current.

Early Years complaints otherwise follow the stages and timescales set out in this policy unless a different timeframe or procedure is required by applicable Panamanian law or a competent regulatory authority.

## 17. Confidentiality and Personal Information

All complaints will be handled with appropriate confidentiality.

Information will be shared only with those who reasonably need it in order to consider, investigate, govern or respond to the matter, or where disclosure is required or permitted by law or a competent authority.

In particular:

- the school will not discuss one pupil's personal circumstances with another family;
- individual pupil matters raised within collective complaints may be handled separately;
- confidential employment or personnel information will not normally be disclosed to complainants;
- personal information will be processed in accordance with applicable Panamanian data protection requirements.

Parents raising collective concerns should also respect the privacy of other pupils and families.

## 18. Records

The school will maintain a written record of all complaints that proceed to Stage 2 or Stage 3.

Records will include:

- the nature of the complaint;
- whether it was resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to Stage 3;
- the findings;
- action taken by the school, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld;
- the final outcome.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access or disclosure is permitted or required under applicable Panamanian law.

This includes access by a competent regulatory authority or authorised inspectorate where such access is permitted by applicable law.

Records will be retained securely in accordance with the school's records-retention requirements and applicable Panamanian data protection law.

## 19. Repeated, Persistent or Unreasonable Complaint Behaviour

The school recognises that parents may feel strongly about matters concerning their children. Persistence, disagreement with the school or making more than one complaint will not, by themselves, be treated as unreasonable behaviour.

However, the complaints procedure should operate in a way that is fair to families and allows school staff to continue carrying out their responsibilities.

Examples of behaviour which may require the school to manage communication differently include:

- repeatedly raising substantially the same matter after the complaints procedure has concluded without significant new evidence;
- excessive or unreasonably frequent correspondence which prevents the school from dealing proportionately with the issue;
- simultaneously pursuing the same complaint through numerous members of staff after a clear point of contact has been established;
- persistently changing the substance of a complaint in a way that prevents it from being investigated;
- making abusive, threatening, discriminatory or defamatory communications;
- seeking confidential information concerning other pupils, families or staff to which the complainant is not entitled.

Where necessary and proportionate, the school may:

- appoint a single point of contact;
- ask that correspondence is directed through a particular channel;
- consolidate multiple communications into one response;
- set reasonable intervals for responses;
- decline to reconsider an issue that has completed the complaints procedure unless significant new evidence is provided.

Any such arrangements will be explained to the parent and will not prevent genuinely new, safeguarding or serious welfare concerns from being raised.

## 20. Conduct and Respect

Parents and members of staff are expected to communicate respectfully throughout the process.

Complaints must be handled in accordance with the Inspired Parent Code of Conduct and the school's commitment to respectful professional relationships.

The school will not tolerate abusive, threatening, discriminatory or defamatory behaviour and may take appropriate and proportionate action where such behaviour occurs.

Likewise, parents making a complaint will be treated professionally and respectfully by the school.

## 21. Concluding a Complaint

Once Stage 3 has concluded, the school's internal complaints process is complete.

The school will not normally reopen the same complaint unless:

- significant new evidence becomes available which could reasonably affect the outcome; or
- a materially new event or concern arises.

A new concern arising from later events may be considered separately under this policy.

Nothing in this section limits safeguarding responsibilities or any rights available under Panamanian law.

## 22. Governance Oversight

Inspired Education governance will:

- receive appropriate anonymised information concerning formal complaints;
- monitor patterns and recurring themes;
- review whether complaints are being dealt with fairly and within appropriate timescales;
- use complaint information, where appropriate, to support school improvement.

The school will make available the number of Stage 2 and Stage 3 complaints received during the preceding school year where required under applicable inspection or regulatory arrangements.

## 24. Timeframes

| Stage | Expected timeframe |
|---|---|
| **Stage 1: Informal** | Acknowledgement normally within 2 working days |
| | Resolution normally within 10 working days where possible |
| **Stage 2: Formal** | Acknowledgement within 3 working days |
| | Written outcome normally within 10 working days of acknowledgement |
| **Stage 3: Panel** | Request normally within 5 working days of Stage 2 outcome |
| | Panel normally convened within 15 working days |
| | Written decision normally within 7 working days of hearing |

Where these timescales cannot reasonably be met, the school will explain the reason and provide a revised timeframe.

## 25. Working Days

For the purposes of this policy, working days are Monday to Friday during school term time, excluding Panamanian public holidays and days on which the school is officially closed.

Where a concern or complaint is received during a school holiday, the relevant timeframe will normally begin on the first official working day of the following term.

This does not apply where safeguarding, welfare, legal or other urgent considerations require earlier action.

## 26. Accessibility

The school will take reasonable steps to ensure parents can access the complaints procedure.

This may include:

- assistance in clarifying a formal complaint;
- translation support where reasonably available;
- alternative formats;
- reasonable adjustments related to disability or another identified need.