ST ALBANS
EDUCATION GROUP

Complaints

September 2026

A group of sector-leading Independent Schools

STAHS

PREP SENIOR SIXTH

PART OF

ST ALBANS EDUCATION GROUP

STAHS Policies

P11: COMPLAINTS

Owner/s:	Head	Date reviewed:	September 2026
STAEG Committee:	Full Council	Next review date:	September 2029

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

1.1. This policy applies to St Albans High School for Girls ("the School" or "STAHS") which includes the Prep School. This policy is reviewed and updated triennially and is available on the School website.

1.2. STAHS has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. STAHS makes its Complaints Procedure available on the School's website and in the School office during the school day, and STAHS will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is available, and of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, STAHS will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

2. WHO CAN USE THIS POLICY

2.1. This policy is for use by current STAHS parents. "Parent(s)" means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a current pupil about whom the complaint relates.

2.2. Although this Procedure is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; it may only be used by parents of current pupils.

2.3. Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the School. The only exception to this is if the complaint is a review of a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of a pupil under clause 7.6 of the School's Parent Contract in which case such a review must be requested by no later than five working days from the date of the decision to exclude or require the removal of a pupil.

2.4. Group complaints

2.4.1. Group complaints or petitions will not be heard by the school; instead, individual signatories to any such complaint will be directed to this policy, which they can then use to raise their individual concerns as related to them as parents or their own children.

2.5. Anonymous complaints

2.5.1. The School does not respond to anonymous complaints, or to complaints sent from individuals who cannot be identified as current STAHS parents (see 'Who can use the policy' section above).

2.6. Data protection complaints

2.6.1. Complaints concerning the processing of personal data may be made by any data subject and are not restricted to current parents. Complaints relating to data protection rights will be handled in accordance with this policy, the School's Data Protection Policy, UK GDPR, and the Data Protection Act 2018.

3. WHAT CONSTITUTES A COMPLAINT?

3.1. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope

of this procedure. 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.

3.2. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.

4. FINANCIAL MATTERS

4.1. If a parent has a complaint about the School Fee Plan then this should be directed to the School or to: School Fee Plan, Ermyn House, Ermyn Way, Leatherhead, Surrey, KT22 8UX. Website: https://www.myschoolfeeplan.com/application/schoolfeeplan Tel: 03447369836.

5. THE THREE-STAGE COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

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 form tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the class teacher or form tutor cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for them to consult with another member of staff, for example a Head of Department, Head of Year, Assistant Head, Deputy Head or Head of Prep.

Complaints made directly to a Deputy Head, Head of Prep, or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant class teacher, form tutor, Head of Year or Assistant Head unless the Deputy Head or Head deems it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.

The member of staff handling the Stage 1 complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days or in the event that the member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Complaints Procedure.

If, however, the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Principal of STAEG on Principal@staeg.org.uk.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. 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 will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases, the Head will meet (or speak to, if a meeting is not possible) the parents concerned, within 5 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

It may be necessary for the Head, or their nominee, to carry out further investigations. The Head will determine who should carry out any investigation and this may be some external to the school.

The Head will keep written records of all formal meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.

Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for the decision. In most cases, the Head will make the decision and provide the parents with reasons within 15 working days of the complaint being put in writing.

If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Principal of STAEG. The Principal of STAEG or their nominee will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents. The Chair of Governors or their nominee may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Principal or their nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Principal or their nominee will give reasons for the decision.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they should do so in writing to the PA to the Principal (PAPrincipal@staeg.org.uk) within 5 days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal.

To the extent the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking action, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such a request should be made to the PA to the Principal in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered.

The Principal will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. The other panel members will normally be the Principal of STAEG and a member of the school governing body. One of the Panel members will be appointed to act as the Chair of the Panel. The PA to the Principal, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days and schedule a hearing to take place within 20 working days.

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 or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than 5 working days prior to the hearing.

The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. The Head shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate, and the companion should not be a lawyer. The identity of the companions should be confirmed to the PA to the Principal as soon as possible and no later than 2 working days before the hearing. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend. It is unusual for children (under the age of 18) or current pupils to attend a Stage 3 Panel Hearing as a witness or companion to the parents. Request for children or current pupils to attend a Stage 3 Panel Hearing in any capacity may be made by the parents and in exceptional circumstances may be granted at the discretion of the Chair of the Panel.

A note-taker will attend the hearing to take note. This will no be a verbatim note but an accurate reflection of what was discussed. Notes of the hearing will be shared with attendees as soon as practicable after the hearing. To the extent there is any disagreement about the content of those notes or further comments from the parties, these will be considered by and, where possible, resolved by the Chair. A copy of any comments on the notes will be appended to the notes.

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

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.

After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and accordingly decide whether to:

- Dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
- Uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
- may 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 will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, within 10 working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of the School governing body, the Chair of STAEG Council, and the Head. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the STAEG Governors, School governing body members, and the Head.

Any complaint of a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of the pupil under clause 7.6 of the School's Parent Contract will be governed by this Stage 3 of the School's Complaints Procedure.

There may be circumstances in which the School consider it necessary and appropriate to deviate from the Stage 3 procedure in the context of appeals for exclusion and required removal, and the School will inform the parents of this. In such circumstances, the Panel may only uphold the complaint and ask the Head to reconsider the decision if they consider, having regard to the process followed by the Head, that the Head's decision to exclude / require the removal of the pupil was not a reasonable decision for the Head to have taken.

6. TIMEFRAME FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

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

6.2. 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 20 working days. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 30 working days.

6.3. Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays. 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.

6.4. 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 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.

7. RECORDING COMPLAINTS AND USE OF PERSONAL DATA

7.1. Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved at the formal stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a Panel hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).

7.2. The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice for Parents and Pupils (available on the Parent Portal and by request from the School). 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:

a) Date when the issue was raised

b) Name of parent

c) Name of pupil

d) Description of the issue

e) Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)

f) Witness statements (if appropriate)

g) Name and contact details of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage

h) Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)

i) Notes and minutes of the hearing, and

j) The Panel's written decision

7.3. 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.

7.4. 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 for Parents and Pupils, Data Protection Policy and Data Retention Policy.

7.5. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

Policy Information

Policy and related documents	
Document title	Availability
P11: Complaints	Website
Guidance for Governors in Conducting a Complaints Hearing Panel	Not public

Policies and related documents as indicated are available to request from info@stahs.org.uk.

St Albans High School for Girls, 1-3 Townsend Avenue, St Albans, AL1 3SJ Tel: 01727 835 800.

This policy can be made available in large print or another accessible format if required.