



Complaints Policy 2026–2027

This is a whole-school policy and applies to all pupils, staff and parents of Copthorne Preparatory School, including EYFS.

Approved by: Governing Body
Responsible Officer: Head of School
Review Frequency: Annual
Next Review: September 2027

Policy Links

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- Low-Level Concerns Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Behaviour Policy
- EYFS Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)

Introduction

Copthorne Preparatory School values positive relationships with parents and aims to resolve concerns promptly, fairly and transparently. The school recognises that concerns and complaints can provide valuable feedback and opportunities for improvement.

This policy outlines the procedures for the handling of complaints and complies with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2014. It applies to all complaints from parents and guardians, including those relating to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

The school will maintain a written record of all complaints, whether resolved informally, formally or through a panel hearing, and will record any actions taken by the school regardless of whether the complaint is upheld.

This policy is:

- Published on the school website and available without password protection.
- Available to current and prospective parents upon request.
- Reviewed annually by the Governing Body.
- Implemented in a fair, transparent and non-discriminatory manner.

Definition of a Complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the school, its services, policies, procedures, staff, governance or educational provision requiring a formal response.

Complaints may relate to:

- The school as a whole.
- A specific department.
- A member of staff.
- A policy or procedure.
- A perceived failure to act appropriately.
- Alleged unfair treatment.

All complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. No pupil will suffer discrimination or adverse treatment because a parent has raised a complaint in good faith.

This procedure does not apply to:

- Staff grievances.
- Staff disciplinary matters.
- Pupil exclusions.
- Subject access requests.
- Whistleblowing concerns.

Separate policies and procedures are available for these matters.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Most concerns can be resolved quickly and informally.

Parents are encouraged to raise concerns initially with:

- Their child's class teacher;
- The relevant subject teacher; or
- Another appropriate member of staff.

If the matter cannot be resolved at this stage, it may be referred to the Head of School.

The school will:

- Listen carefully to concerns raised.
- Seek clarification where necessary.
- Investigate appropriately.
- Aim to resolve the matter at the earliest opportunity.
- Maintain a written record of concerns raised and actions taken.

Where possible, concerns should be resolved within **seven working days during term time**. If resolution is not achieved, parents will be advised of the formal complaints process.

Complaints concerning the Head of School should be addressed directly to the Chair of Governors.

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

If a complaint cannot be resolved informally, parents should submit the complaint in writing to the Head of School.

The written complaint should include:

- Details of the complaint.
- Relevant dates and events.
- Any supporting documentation.
- The outcome sought by the complainant.

Upon receipt, the Head of School will:

- Acknowledge the complaint.
- Determine the most appropriate course of action.
- Conduct an investigation or delegate investigation where appropriate.
- Arrange a meeting or discussion if required.
- Keep an appropriate written record of all communications and findings.

A written response, including reasons for the decision, will normally be provided once the investigation has concluded.

Where the complaint concerns the Head of School, the Chair of Governors will investigate the complaint and provide the written response.

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they must notify the school in writing within **28 days** of receiving the Stage 2 outcome to request a Stage 3 Panel Hearing.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

If the complainant is not satisfied with the Stage 2 response, they may request that the complaint is referred to a Complaints Panel.

Requests should be submitted in writing to the Clerk to the Governors (Bursar) within **28 days** of the Stage 2 decision.

The school will convene a Complaints Panel within **10 working days** where reasonably practicable.

The Panel will consist of:

- Three individuals who have had no prior involvement in the complaint.
- At least one independent member who is not involved in the management, governance or ownership of the school.

The complainant will be offered the opportunity to:

- Attend the hearing.
- Present their case.
- Submit evidence.
- Be accompanied by one other person.

Following the hearing, the Panel may:

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint in whole or in part.
- Recommend actions to address identified issues.
- Recommend further investigation where appropriate.

The Panel's findings and recommendations will be provided in writing, together with the reasons for the decision, within **five working days** of the hearing wherever possible.

The findings and recommendations will be provided to:

- The complainant.
- The person complained about (where applicable).
- The Chair of Governors.
- The Head of School.

They will also be available for inspection by the proprietor, ISI and the Secretary of State where required by law.

The Panel's decision concludes the school's internal complaints procedure.

Timeframes

The school aims to manage complaints promptly and fairly.

Normally:

- Complaints will be acknowledged within five working days during term time.
- Stage 1 and Stage 2 will normally be completed within twenty working days.
- Stage 3 will normally be completed within a further twenty working days.
- The full procedure will usually conclude within forty working days during term time.

Where delays are unavoidable, the complainant will be kept informed of revised timescales and reasons for delay.

Record Keeping

The school maintains comprehensive written records of complaints, including:

- Date received.
- Name of complainant.

- Name of pupil(s) involved.
- Nature of the complaint.
- Stage reached.
- Investigation findings.
- Evidence considered.
- Correspondence.
- Outcome.
- Actions taken by the school.

Records will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required:

- By law;
- By the Secretary of State;
- By ISI;
- During safeguarding investigations;
- During legal proceedings.

Complaint records relating to EYFS provision will be retained for at least three years. Other complaints will normally be retained for a minimum of six years.

EYFS Complaints

Parents of EYFS pupils may use the school's complaints procedure to raise any concerns relating to the school's fulfilment of EYFS requirements.

The school will investigate EYFS complaints and notify complainants of the outcome within **28 days** wherever reasonably practicable.

Records of EYFS complaints will be retained for at least three years and made available to inspectors upon request.

Parents may contact the following organisations regarding EYFS concerns:

Ofsted

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

Website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)

CAP House
9–12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA

Website: www.isi.net

Safeguarding Concerns

Any complaint that raises a safeguarding concern, allegation against a member of staff, low-level concern, child protection concern or concern regarding the welfare of a child will be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Such matters will be managed in accordance with:

- The Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy;
- The Staff Code of Conduct;
- The Low-Level Concerns Policy;
- Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026; and
- Relevant statutory guidance.

Where appropriate, referrals may be made to Children's Social Care, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), the Police or other relevant agencies.

External Escalation

If a complainant remains dissatisfied after completion of the school's internal complaints procedure, they may contact:

- Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI)
- Department for Education (DfE)

ISI does not investigate individual complaints but may consider complaint information as part of its regulatory inspection and compliance functions.

Nothing in this policy prevents a parent from referring safeguarding concerns directly to Children's Social Care, the Police, the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), Ofsted (where relevant) or any other appropriate agency.

Monitoring and Oversight

The Governing Body will receive anonymised information relating to complaints received by the school. This information will be reviewed periodically to identify patterns, themes, trends and opportunities for improvement.

The findings of complaint reviews may be used to inform:

- School improvement planning;
- Staff training;
- Policy development;
- Risk management processes;
- Safeguarding oversight arrangements.

The school will maintain an annual record of complaints for monitoring and governance purposes.

Data Protection

The school complies with the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR).

All complaints information will be processed, stored and retained in accordance with the school's Data Protection Policy and Records Retention Schedule.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Head of School and approved by the Governing Body, or sooner in response to changes in legislation, statutory guidance, regulatory requirements or school practice.