ST AMBROSE PREPARATORY SCHOOL



COMPLAINTS POLICY

Reviewed: September 2026

To be reviewed: September 2027

This policy has been written in consultation with staff and governors of St. Ambrose Preparatory School and with due regard to the school's mission statement:

At St Ambrose we aim to provide an independent Catholic education for boys and girls of all faiths aged 3 to 11; St Ambrose is an inclusive school where the Gospel teachings and our school values are at the centre of everything that happens in our school family. At St Ambrose we strive to develop happy, fulfilled, well educated, confident and caring children who know and understand the love, joy and peace of Jesus; and to show our Faith by the way we live, showing care and consideration for each other, those around us and the environment.

Our Vision

Our Vision is to be an exemplar Edmund Rice School, with an enviable reputation amongst our peers, both as an organisation and for the services and facilities we provide, making us first choice for parents and pupils in our geographic area.

Our Ethos & Values

At St Ambrose we provide a Catholic school community in which pupils feel welcome, safe, recognised for their individuality – supported by a community of love, and affection. We strive to live the Gospel in all aspects of school life and policy, following Blessed Edmund's footsteps.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

St Ambrose Preparatory School is committed to providing high-quality education and pastoral care. If parents have a concern or complaint, they can expect it to be treated with care, fairness and in accordance with this procedure. The Governing Body maintains strategic oversight of the procedure and reviews its effectiveness.

1. AVAILABILITY, SCOPE AND DEFINITIONS

This procedure is made available to parents of current and prospective pupils on the School website and from the School office. It may be used by parents of current pupils, including parents of EYFS pupils. Complaints from parents of former pupils will be considered under this procedure only where the complaint was initially raised while the pupil was registered at the School. Prospective parents may raise admissions concerns under the Admissions Policy, but do not have access to this three-stage procedure.

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. Any matter about which a parent of a current pupil is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within scope, regardless of how it is labelled. A concern may be resolved informally, but the School will not use terminology to prevent a parent accessing the formal stages.

This procedure does not replace another process required by law or School policy. Safeguarding concerns are referred immediately under the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy; complaints about data protection may also engage the Data Protection complaints process; and appeals against exclusion or required removal are considered under the School's Behaviour, Exclusions and Required Removal Policy. Where matters overlap, the School will explain how they will be handled without restricting access to this complaints procedure.

"Parent" means a person with parental responsibility for the pupil to whom the complaint relates. For EYFS complaints, "parent and/or carer" also includes a person who has responsibility for the child's care. "Working day" means a weekday during term time, excluding bank holidays and half-term holidays. The School will make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that parents and pupils can participate fairly in the process.

The School may be unable to share all material gathered or action taken, even where a complaint is upheld, because of data protection, confidentiality, safeguarding, employment or other legal obligations. Sufficient information will nevertheless be given to explain the

decision fairly.

2. PRINCIPLES

- Complaints will be dealt with impartially, sensitively, consistently and as promptly as reasonably practicable.
- No pupil will be penalised because a complaint is made in good faith by or on behalf of the pupil.
- No person will determine a complaint in which they have been materially involved. Those criticised will be given sufficient information and a fair opportunity to respond.
- Parents are expected to engage constructively, provide relevant information promptly and respect the confidentiality of the process.
- The School will identify learning, trends and systemic issues arising from complaints and will take and monitor appropriate action.
- Anonymous complaints do not automatically engage the three-stage procedure, but the Head or Chair of Governors will decide whether the substance warrants investigation or other action.
- A complaint may be withdrawn at any time; the School may nevertheless continue to consider matters where safeguarding, regulatory, legal or wider school concerns remain.

3. THE THREE-STAGE PROCEDURE

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most concerns and complaints will be resolved quickly and informally. Parents should normally contact their child's class teacher. If the matter is sensitive, confidential, concerns the class teacher, or is otherwise unsuitable for that route, the parent should contact a senior member of staff or the Head. A complaint about the Head should be made to the Chair of Governors via the School office.

The staff member will make a written record of the concern or complaint and the date received. The School will seek to resolve the matter within 10 working days. If the matter is not resolved within that period, or the parent remains dissatisfied, the parent will be advised that they may proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

A formal complaint must be put in writing to the Head, setting out the matters complained of and the action sought. The School will acknowledge receipt within two working days. The Head may ask for clarification and may nominate an appropriately senior and impartial person to investigate and/or determine the complaint. The decision-taker must not have been materially involved in the matters complained of and must be more senior than any staff member whose conduct is at issue.

The Head or nominee will normally meet or speak with the parent within 10 working days of receiving the complaint. Further investigation may be carried out by an appropriate internal or external person. Written records will be kept of formal meetings and interviews; notes will be an accurate reflection rather than a verbatim transcript.

The decision-taker will write to the parent with the decision and reasons, normally within 20 working days of receipt of the written complaint or any requested clarification. The response will explain how to request Stage 3 if the parent remains dissatisfied.

If the complaint is about the Head, it must be sent to the Chair of Governors. The Chair will appoint an impartial person to investigate and determine the complaint, and the Stage 2 process above will apply. The Chair should avoid substantive involvement where this may compromise the ability to appoint or support an impartial Stage 3 panel.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the parent remains dissatisfied following Stage 2, they may request a panel hearing by writing to the Clerk to the Governors via the School office within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 decision. The request should identify the matters to be considered and may include supporting evidence. The School will consider a reasonable extension where extenuating circumstances impeded a timely request.

The Clerk will acknowledge the request within five working days and will arrange a hearing, normally within 20 working days. The panel will be appointed on behalf of the Governing Body and will consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters complained of. At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the School. One member will act as Chair of the panel.

The panel may request further particulars, evidence or investigation in advance. Relevant papers will normally be circulated to the parties and panel members at least five working days before the hearing, subject to data protection, confidentiality and safeguarding

requirements.

The parent may attend and be accompanied by one other person. The Stage 2 decision-taker may also be accompanied. A companion may be a relative, friend or teacher; legal representation is not ordinarily appropriate and a companion should not be a lawyer unless the panel Chair gives prior permission in exceptional circumstances. The panel will decide whether witnesses should attend.

A note-taker will attend. The note will not be verbatim but will accurately reflect the discussion. It will be shared as soon as reasonably practicable; comments or disagreements will be considered by the panel Chair and, where unresolved, appended to the note. If a parent chooses not to attend, the hearing will still proceed unless the complaint has been withdrawn in writing.

The panel will consider the merits of the complaint and the relevant facts. It may dismiss or uphold the complaint in whole or in part and may make recommendations for the School to consider. It cannot award financial compensation, impose disciplinary sanctions or otherwise compel the School to take a particular step.

The panel will write to the parent with its decision and reasons within five working days of the hearing, unless further investigation is required. The decision is final. The findings and recommendations will be sent to the parent, the person complained about where relevant, the Chair of Governors and the Stage 2 decision-taker, and will be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.

4. TIMESCALES

The target is to complete Stages 1 and 2 within 20 working days and Stage 3 within a further 20 working days. During school holidays, significant disruption or unavoidable staff absence, it may take longer. Any deviation from the normal term-time timetable will be exceptional, explained to the parent and kept to the minimum reasonably practicable. The School will set a revised date and provide progress updates where appropriate.

5. SAFEGUARDING, DATA PROTECTION AND OTHER PROCEDURES

A complaint that raises a safeguarding concern will be referred immediately to the DSL and handled under the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. The complaints process may be paused, adapted or run alongside a statutory process where required by children’s social care, the LADO or police. Safeguarding action will not be delayed by this procedure.

Where a complaint includes a data protection issue, the School will identify and acknowledge that aspect and will comply with applicable data protection legislation and its Data Protection complaints process. Where practical, related issues may be considered together, but this will not prevent a parent from using this complaints procedure. The School will facilitate data protection complaints and respond without undue delay. Where the issue is also a subject access request or another request with a specific statutory time limit, the School will comply with the applicable statutory timescale.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORDS

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. Information may also be shared where required by a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation, or where necessary for the fair operation of this procedure.

The School will keep a written record of all formal complaints made under Stage 2 or Stage 3, whether resolved at Stage 2 or proceeding to a panel hearing, the outcome, and any action taken by the School regardless of whether the complaint was upheld. Informal concerns may also be recorded for management and monitoring purposes.

Records may include the date, names of the parent and pupil, the complaint, investigation records, witness information, correspondence, meeting notes, the decision and action taken. The School processes this information in accordance with its Privacy Notice, Data Protection Policy and retention schedule. Complaints with no safeguarding implications will normally be retained for at least seven years. Records with safeguarding implications, records relevant to actual or contemplated litigation, or records subject to a legal hold will be retained for the longer applicable period.

The School will review complaint records for recurring themes, systemic issues or weaknesses in policy or practice. Appropriate actions will be recorded, assigned, monitored and reported to governors in anonymised form.

7. PERSISTENT CORRESPONDENCE AND UNREASONABLE CONDUCT

Where the same complaint has been considered at all three stages, the School may inform the parent that the procedure is exhausted and the matter is closed. Repeated attempts to reopen the same matter may be treated as vexatious and outside this procedure. This will not prevent consideration of genuinely new evidence or a new and distinct complaint.

The School will not refuse to consider a complaint merely because a parent is persistent or because legal proceedings have been threatened or started. However, abusive, threatening, discriminatory, harassing or excessively disruptive conduct may be managed under the Parent Code of Conduct. The School may set proportionate communication arrangements while preserving access to the complaints procedure and making reasonable adjustments where required.

8. EYFS COMPLAINTS

Parents and/or carers of EYFS pupils should use the three stages of this procedure. A written complaint concerning the School's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements will be investigated and the person who made the complaint notified of the outcome within 28 days of receipt.

St Ambrose is inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). Parents and/or carers who remain dissatisfied about the School's fulfilment of EYFS requirements may contact the relevant inspectorate. Current contact details for ISI, and for Ofsted where applicable, will be made available to parents and/or carers. The School will make a written record of EYFS complaints and their outcomes available to Ofsted, or any other body legally entitled to receive it, on request.

9. AVAILABILITY AND ANNUAL INFORMATION

The School will make this procedure available to parents of current and prospective pupils and will make available the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. Details will also be provided on request to the Secretary of State, ISI or any other legally entitled body.

Formal complaints registered in the 2025–26 school year: 2

10. REVIEW

The Governing Body will review this procedure at least annually and sooner if legislation, regulatory guidance, inspection findings, complaint trends or experience indicate that amendment is required. The next scheduled review is Summer 2027.