



International School of Cape Town **Policy on the handling of concerns and complaints**

Introduction

- 1 **Circulation:** This policy to all members of staff at the International School of Cape Town and, on request, to parents, prospective parents and pupils.
- 2 **Policy status:** This policy has been approved by the Board of ISCT. It provides guidelines for handling concerns and complaints. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain elements of the procedures can only be carried out during term time.
- 3 **Application:** Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue or if the Principal suspends, expels or asks a pupil to leave and the parents seek a review by the ISCT Board of that decision.
- 4 **"Parent/s"/"You"** includes a current or prospective parent or legal guardian, and may at our discretion include a parent or legal guardian whose child has recently left the School.
- 5 **Five stages:** This policy describes a five stage procedure -

Stage 1 - Informal raising of a concern or difficulty, notified orally or in writing to a member of staff.

Stage 2 – Referral of the concern to the Head of Key Stage.

Stage 3 - A formal complaint in writing to the Principal.

Stage 4 - A referral to the Chairman of the ISCT Board.

A concern about the safety of your child should be notified immediately to the person you believe is best placed to take urgent action and should be confirmed in writing to the Principal.

Policy aim and statement

- 6 **Aim:** The aim of this policy is to ensure that a concern or complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently and at the appropriate level, and resolved as soon as possible. Doing so is good practice, it is fair to those concerned and it helps to promote parents' and pupils' confidence in our ability to safeguard and promote welfare. We will try to resolve every concern or complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, reviewing our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances.
- 7 **Policy statement:** We need to know **as soon as possible** if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We



recognise that a difficulty, which is not resolved quickly and fairly, can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to our school culture. Parents and pupils should never feel - or be made to feel - that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or his/her opportunities at this school. The policy however distinguishes between a **concern or difficulty** which can be resolved informally and a **formal complaint** that will require investigation.

Management of complaints

- 8 **Designated Person:** The Principal is responsible for investigating and resolving complaints. The main responsibilities of the Designated Person are to -
- 8.1 Be the first point of contact while the matter remains unresolved and to keep records.
 - 8.2 Co-ordinate the complaints procedures in school.
 - 8.3 Maintain an on-going training programme for all school employees in relation to complaints.
 - 8.4 Monitor the keeping, confidentiality and storage of records in relation to complaints.
 - 8.5 Report regularly to the ISCT Board with respect to complaints.
- 9 **Staff on duty:** A senior member of staff (Member of the Senior Management Team) is on duty at all times when the School is open. That senior member of staff has authority to take decisions relating to most matters of pastoral care and discipline.

Stage 1 - Concerns & difficulties

- 10 **Concerns:** We expect that most concerns, where a parent or pupil seeks intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, can be resolved informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error.
- 11 **Notification:** Please raise the concern initially as follows -
- 11.1 **Education issues** - if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write to the Teacher concerned.
 - 11.2 **Pastoral care** - for concerns relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to one of the Student Counsellors.
 - 11.3 **Disciplinary matters** - a problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed it, and, if not resolved,



with the Key Stage Head.

- 11.4 **Financial matters** - a query relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Business Manager, in the first instance.
- 12 **Acknowledgement:** We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, e-mail or letter within five working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing.
- 13 Should the concern / complaint not be adequately addressed by the member of staff to whom it has been referred, the issue should be taken up with the staff member's line manager or immediate superior. In the case of teachers and teaching related concerns this will be the Head of Phase / Key Stage.

Stage 2 – Referral to the Head of Phase / Key Stage

- 14 Upon being made aware of the concern, the Head of Phase / Key Stage should immediately investigate the merits of the issue raised by the parent and thereafter convene a meeting involving all the stakeholders within 3 working days.
- 15 Written and verbal feedback should then be provided to the parent as well as the teacher / member of staff.
- 16 **Unresolved concerns:** A concern, which has not been resolved by informal means within 15 working days, should be notified in writing as a **formal complaint** which will be dealt with in accordance with Stage 3 below.

Stage 3 - Formal complaint

- 17 **Notification:** An unresolved concern under Stage 1 and 2, or a complaint which needs investigation, or a dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration should be set out in writing with full details and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details in an email addressed to the **Principal's Personal Assistant**. Your complaint will be acknowledged by telephone or in writing within five working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.
- 18 **Investigation:** The Principal may ask a senior member of staff to act as "**investigator**" and/or may involve one or more local members of the Board of Governors. The investigator/s may request additional information from you and will probably wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. The outcome of the investigation will be reported to the Principal who will then notify you in writing of his/her decision and the reasons for it. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to your complaint.



Stage 4 - Referral to the Chairman of the Board of ISCT

- 19 If you are dissatisfied with the Principal's decision as detailed under Stage 3, your complaint may be referred in writing to the Chairman of the ISCT Board and the Education Development Trust Director for Independent Schools.
- 20 **Composition:** The Chairman of the ISCT Board, will constitute a Complaints Panel ("**Panel**") comprising suitably qualified members of the parent body or the staff body, and members who are independent of the governance, management and running of the School. If the matter is sufficiently serious, the Chairman may constitute a Panel of suitably qualified persons independent of the School.
- 21 **Notification:** To request a hearing before the Panel please write to the Secretary of the ISCT Board (PA to the Principal) **within five working days of the decision complained of**. Ordinarily, requests will only be considered if you have completed the procedures at Stages 1-4. If the matter is sufficiently serious and urgent, and warrants the immediate attention of the Board of ISCT, you may approach the Chairman directly. The Chairman, in his or her discretion, may refer the concern for prior consideration in terms of the procedure set out in Stage 2, Stage 3 or Stage 4. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents, correspondence and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Secretary. Please state in your letter the outcome that you desire and all the grounds of your complaint. Please also send the Secretary a list of the documents which you believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to consider. The Secretary will acknowledge your request in writing within five working days.
- 22 **Convening the Panel:** The Secretary in consultation with the Chairman will convene the Panel as soon as reasonably practicable. The Panel will not normally sit during half terms or school holidays. The Panel will consist normally of **a minimum of three individuals** who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint. At least one member of the Panel shall be an **independent member**. You may ask the Secretary to tell you who has been appointed to sit on the Panel. The Panel will be allowed to consult with and take advice from professional advisors.
- 23 **Notice of hearing:** As soon as reasonably practicable, the Secretary will send you written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it.
- 24 **Attendance:** You will be asked to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative, teacher, or friend. It is not necessary for that person to be legally qualified but if you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, please notify the School at least seven days before the hearing. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Secretary at least **three clear days** prior to the hearing.
- 25 **Chairman:** The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by themselves) and will

Woodland Heights · 4 Edinburgh Close · Claremont · 7708 · Cape Town · South Africa · T +27 21 761 6202

Struben House · 31 Eden Road · Claremont · 7708 · Cape Town · South Africa · T +27 21 180 4240

W www.isct.co.za · E info@isct.co.za



be conducted in an informal manner.

- 26 **Hearing:** All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. The Panel chair may direct that the hearing is tape recorded to assist accurate recollection for purposes of the decision. The Panel will be under no obligation to retain the recording thereafter. The Secretary (or a person nominated by the Secretary) will be asked to take a handwritten minute of the proceedings in any event.
- 27 **Evidence:** The Panel chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take written statements into account.
- 28 **Conduct:** All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Panel chair. If terminated, the original decision will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be recorded in writing.
- 29 **Adjournment:** The Panel chair may, at his/her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue.
- 30 **Decision:** After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel shall reach a Decision unless there is an agreed position. The Panel's Decision may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to you within seven working days. Brief written reasons for the Decision will be given. The Decision may include recommendations and will be sent to you, the Chairman of the ISCT Board, the Principal and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made.
- 31 **Private hearing:** A hearing before the Panel is private. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.
- 32 **Confidentiality:** Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by law.

Patrick Brazier
Chairman of ISCT Board
Education Development Trust

Kascha Reed
Principal
International School of Cape Town

Date: February 27th, 2023