

Complaints Procedure for International School Groningen

This document is intended for all members of the school community and is available on the school's public website and on the staff and student intranet pages.

Introduction

International School Groningen (ISG) is committed to a complaints procedure that is transparent, inclusive, fair, and accessible. The policy is designed not only to meet Dutch educational requirements but also to reflect international best practice by promoting respect, accountability, timeliness, confidentiality, and active listening. Its core purpose is to ensure that all members of the school community can raise concerns safely, have those concerns handled seriously and impartially, and receive a clear route toward resolution. The procedure also supports a culture of trust, dialogue, and continuous improvement within the school.

Definitions and Scope of Complaints

A complaint is understood as any expression of dissatisfaction regarding the conduct, decisions, services, or overall functioning of the school. This may be expressed orally or in writing and may come from students, parents, staff members, or other stakeholders. The policy distinguishes between informal concerns, which may be resolved through routine communication, and formal complaints, which require formal review and response. All concerns, whether minor or serious, are to be taken seriously.

The procedure applies broadly to complaints connected to ISG's educational provision and environment, including academic matters, school policies, administrative decisions, facilities, and staff conduct. It applies not only to current students and parents, but also to staff and, where relevant, wider community members. Where a complaint falls under a separate legal or specialist procedure, such as safeguarding or formal academic appeals, that dedicated route takes precedence.

Step-by-Step Process for Submitting a Complaint

ISG provides a staged process so that complaints can be addressed as early and as appropriately as possible, using in-person, written, or digital channels.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

The procedure begins, where appropriate, with informal resolution. The complainant is encouraged to raise the issue directly with the person most closely involved, for example, a teacher, staff member, or relevant colleague. This may happen face-to-face, by email, or by phone. The purpose is to resolve straightforward concerns quickly and amicably through respectful dialogue. If a student does not feel comfortable approaching the person directly, they may seek support from a mentor, counsellor, or confidential advisor. Informal resolution is encouraged but not compulsory. A complainant may proceed directly to the formal stage if the matter is serious or informal discussion is unsuitable.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint to the Head of School

If the concern is unresolved or serious, a formal complaint should be submitted, normally in writing, to the Head of School. This may be done by email, letter, or, where needed, through a



verbal meeting in which a staff member records the complaint on the complainant's behalf. This ensures accessibility for those who may face language or other barriers.

Once received, the complaint is acknowledged promptly, usually within two working days. The Head of School or delegate then arranges an initial meeting or call, also typically within two working days, to discuss the matter in detail. An investigation follows, which may include reviewing records, speaking with relevant individuals, and considering all available evidence while maintaining confidentiality. If there is a conflict of interest, such as a complaint involving the Head of School, another senior or external impartial person takes over the investigation. The complainant may be accompanied by a support person during formal meetings.

Following the investigation, the Head of School issues a written outcome, usually within 10 working days. The response explains the decision, any actions to be taken, and, where relevant, remedies such as an apology, clarification, support measures, or changes to practice. If additional time is required, the complainant is informed and given a revised timeline. All actions and correspondence are documented confidentially.

Stage 3 – Escalation to School Leadership

If the complainant remains dissatisfied, or if the complaint concerns the Head of School, the matter may be escalated to the Rector/Principal of Maartenscollege. This escalation is made in writing and should explain why the earlier outcome is unsatisfactory. The Rector or delegate reviews the case afresh, may conduct additional investigation, and issues a written decision, usually within a further 10 working days. This stage serves as the school's internal appeal mechanism and is intended to provide an impartial second review.

Stage 4 – External Review by the Independent Complaints Committee

If the complaint remains unresolved, the complainant may appeal to the Stichting Carmelcollege Independent Complaints Committee. (Please contact: secretariaat van de klachtencommissie, via postbus 864, 7550 AW in Hengelo or 074 245 55 55)

This committee is external to the school's day-to-day management and provides an impartial review. The complainant submits a written account of the complaint, supporting documents, and a record of prior steps taken. The committee may investigate further, hold hearings, and make findings and recommendations to the school board. The board then communicates the outcome. This external review forms the final stage within the school's formal complaints framework.

For further information, please see: <https://carmel.nl/klachten> (in Dutch)

For staff only there is a possibility of contacting an independent confidential advisor – see appendix, page 5

Stage 5 – Beyond the School

If a serious grievance remains unresolved, the complainant may seek further advice or oversight from external authorities such as the Dutch Inspectorate of Education, relevant ombudsman



services, or other competent bodies. In serious cases involving safety, discrimination, harassment, or legal rights, outside authorities may also be involved. While these routes are beyond the school's own complaints structure, the policy recognises and respects the complainant's right to pursue them.

Roles and Responsibilities in the Process

The policy clearly assigns responsibility across the complaints pathway. The complainant is expected to raise the matter in good faith, provide relevant information, and participate in the process respectfully. The Confidential Advisor acts as a trusted support person, especially in sensitive cases, helping individuals understand options and navigate the process without making decisions on the complaint itself. Teachers and other staff are expected to engage constructively, cooperate with investigations, and maintain confidentiality.

The Head of School is primarily responsible for handling formal complaints at the school level, including acknowledgement, investigation, decision-making, record-keeping, and follow-up. Other leaders may assist where subject expertise or delegated responsibility is needed. At the escalation stage, the Rector or Board representative provides an objective second review. At the external stage, the Independent Complaints Committee ensures an impartial judgment. The Stichting Carmelcollege Board oversees the integrity of the overall mechanism and ensures recommendations are acted upon.

Mechanisms for Inclusive Stakeholder Input

A key principle of the policy is inclusivity. The procedure is open to students, parents, staff, and relevant community members. It recognises student voice, supports parental involvement, values staff input, and allows for collaborative or mediated resolution where appropriate. Because ISG is an international school community, the policy also emphasises cultural sensitivity and the removal of practical barriers, including support with communication and language where needed. In this way, the complaints process is not only reactive, but also part of a wider culture of dialogue and participation.

Timelines for Acknowledgement, Investigation, and Resolution

The policy places strong emphasis on timely handling. Formal complaints should be acknowledged within 1–2 working days. An initial meeting or active investigation should begin within about 2 working days. School-level complaints should generally be resolved within 10 working days, although more complex matters may take longer if the complainant is kept informed. Escalated complaints should also be handled promptly, with the Rector usually responding within about 10 working days and the external committee typically working within a longer but still defined timeframe. Prompt communication, updates during delays, and clarity about next steps are all part of the procedure's operational expectations.

Escalation and External Review Options

The escalation pathway is clearly defined: from a staff member or informal contact to the Head of School, to the Rector or a Board representative, to the Independent Complaints Committee, and finally, where appropriate, to external authorities. At each stage, the complainant retains the right to move forward if dissatisfied, and the school is expected to cooperate fully with any



review. This clear hierarchy reinforces transparency and ensures that complaints can be reconsidered by increasingly independent levels of authority.

Safeguards: No Retaliation and Assurance of Impartiality

The policy expressly prohibits retaliation against anyone who raises or participates in a complaint. Students, parents, and staff must be able to speak up without fear of disadvantage. Equally important is impartiality: complaints must be reviewed by individuals without a conflict of interest, and all parties must be given a fair opportunity to present their accounts. Investigations are based on evidence, established policy, and due process rather than personal opinion. Confidentiality, training, and oversight all support the fairness and integrity of decision-making.

Communication with Complainants and Respecting Privacy

The policy stresses that complainants should be kept informed throughout the process in language that is clear, respectful, and accessible. They should know who is handling the complaint, what steps will follow, and what timelines apply. At the same time, privacy is carefully protected: complaint information is shared only on a need-to-know basis, records are kept securely, and outcomes are not publicised beyond those directly involved. The intention is to maintain openness with the complainant while safeguarding the dignity and confidentiality of all parties.

Continuous Improvement and Feedback on the Procedure

The procedure is also intended to support school improvement. ISG monitors complaints, reviews patterns, evaluates response quality, and updates the policy regularly. Feedback from those who have used the process may be invited to improve communication and accessibility. The school also reviews the procedure in light of evolving legal requirements and international standards. In this sense, the policy treats complaints not only as issues to be resolved, but also as a source of institutional learning.

Conclusion

In essence, the policy establishes a comprehensive and inclusive framework through which concerns can be raised, heard, investigated, and resolved fairly. Its central objective is to protect trust in the school community by ensuring accessibility, procedural clarity, accountability, timely action, impartial review, and respect for all involved. By combining clear, staged procedures with strong safeguards and opportunities for review, ISG positions the complaints process as both a mechanism for resolution and a tool for strengthening the school culture over time

This document was reviewed and rewritten in March 2026

The next review will take place in March 2029



Appendix:

External confidential advisor for staff

In addition to the above, Carmel offers its staff the option of contacting an external confidential advisor. It is important to consult an external, confidential advisor in cases where staff members' interests may be at risk. For example, in situations where a member of staff is themselves suspected of sexual harassment, aggression or violence towards a student at the school.

The external confidential advisor for employees of the Carmelcollege Foundation is Caroline van Zoelen.

She can be contacted by email: c.van.zoelen-freij@humancapitalcare.nl (available on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays) or by telephone on 06 221 665 18.

Alternatively, via HumanCapitalCare's general telephone number: 074-7500100 (Monday to Friday).