

Complaints Policy and Procedures (Parents & Carers)

This policy statement sets out the College's approach to dealing with concerns and complaints from parents and carers. Further details of how we handle them are contained in our summary leaflet, *Concerns and complaints - What to do if you're worried about your child's progress or wellbeing at school*, which you can obtain on request from the College office or access via the College website: www.alechunter.essex.sch.uk. A comprehensive Complaints Procedure document is also available in the same way.

1. We value **good home/school relations** and will, therefore, do everything we can to establish and maintain them. This includes seeking to resolve any concerns or complaints promptly, and to the satisfaction of all concerned.
2. We welcome **feedback** on what parents feel we do well, or not so well, as a school. We will consider carefully all feedback, whether positive or negative, and will review our policies and practices accordingly.
3. We will **acknowledge** all written concerns and complaints within **three working days** of receipt and will respond fully, or send a holding response, within **ten working days** of receipt. School holiday periods do not count as working days, and it is not normally possible to deal with complaints when the College office is closed.
4. We will **treat all concerns and complaints seriously and courteously** and will advise parents and others of the College's procedures for dealing with their concerns. In return, we expect parents and other complainants to **behave respectfully towards all members of the College community**. In particular, any disagreement with the College should not be expressed inappropriately, especially not in front of students or other visitors to the College.
5. It is not always possible for the relevant member of staff to see immediately complainants who **arrive unannounced** at the College. Please see further guidance on this matter in our Complaints Procedures document.
6. All College staff, teaching and non-teaching; and members of the Governing Body, will receive a copy of this policy statement and will be familiar with the College's procedures for dealing with parental concerns and complaints, to which they will have access as required.
7. The College's procedures will be reviewed regularly and updated as necessary.
8. Staff and governors will receive **training** in handling concerns and complaints as appropriate. This may be on an individual basis or as a group activity for all staff or for specific groups, such as the office staff or members of the Governing Body.
9. Whilst we will seek to resolve concerns and complaints to the satisfaction of all parties, it may not be possible to achieve this in every case. We will, therefore, use our option to **close a complaint** before all the stages of the College's procedures have been exhausted, if we believe this to be appropriate.
10. The Government advocates the resolution of concerns and complaints at school level wherever possible, in the interests of maintaining good home/school relations. We will do everything we can do to meet this expectation. We will also co-operate with

the any national appeals process where cases are taken to that level after consideration by the Governing Body of the College.

Complaints Procedure (Parents & Carers)

Our procedures for dealing with general concerns

The majority of concerns from parents, carers and others are handled under the following general procedures.

The procedure is divided into three stages:

Stage 1 aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in College (as described on pages 2 and 3 of this guidance).

Stage 2 is the first formal stage at which written complaints are considered by the Headteacher.

Stage 3 is the next stage once Stage 2 has been worked through. It involves a complaints review panel of governors.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

Stage 1 – Your initial contact with the College

1. Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us. The first point of contact should be your child's Achievement Co-ordinator, regarding concerns about school work or policy; or the appropriate Pastoral Leader for the year group if it is about your child's welfare, for example bullying issues or other anxieties. Please contact the College office on 01376 321813 to make an appointment with the relevant member of staff.
2. We will see you, or contact you by telephone or in writing, as soon as possible after your concern is made known to us. The appropriate person with responsibility for particular issues raised by you will make a clear note of the details and will check later to make sure that the matter has been followed up.
3. We will ensure that you are clear what action or monitoring of the situation, if any, has been agreed. We will confirm this in writing to you.
4. We will ensure that we speak directly to all appropriate persons who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.
5. We will discuss with you (normally within ten working days) the progress of our enquiries. You will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further, once we have responded to your concern.
6. If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

Stage 2 - Formal consideration of your complaint

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined under Stage 1 above.

1. Normally, your written complaint should be addressed to the Headteacher. If, however, your complaint concerns the Headteacher personally, it should be sent to the school marked "For the attention of the Chair of Governors"
2. We will acknowledge your complaint in writing within **three working days** of receiving it.
3. Normally we would expect to respond in full within ten working days but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay **within ten working days** and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.
4. Whilst we cannot guarantee to deal with complaints during school holiday periods, we will do our best to do so where the timing is crucial to the concern in question.
5. As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and fill in any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
6. The Headteacher, or Chair of Governors, may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
7. Following the meeting, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a student we will talk to the student concerned and, where appropriate, to others present at the time of the incident in question.
8. We will normally talk to students with a parent or carer present, unless this would delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint, or where a student has specifically said that he or she would prefer the parent or carer not to be involved. In such circumstances, we will ensure that another member of staff, with whom the student feels comfortable, is present.
9. If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the College's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
10. The Headteacher or Chair of Governors will keep written/typed, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
11. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give a full explanation of the Headteacher's Chair of Governor's decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you.
12. The person investigating your complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the complaint, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point. Please see the next page for further information about this process.
13. If we do not close the complaint after Stage 2, you may wish to proceed to Stage 3, as described below.

Closure of complaints

- Very occasionally, the College will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.
- We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the College but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is, therefore, a case of "agreeing to disagree".
- If a complainant persists in making representations to the College– to the Headteacher, Chair of Governors or anyone else - this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the children in our care.
- For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint.
- In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached Stage 3 of the procedures described in this document. This is because a complaints panel takes considerable time and effort to set up and we must be confident that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.

The Chair of Governors may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint and that a complaints review panel would not help to move things forward.

- This does not, of course, prevent you from referring your complaint to any new appeals body, once the new national arrangements are in place, as described under 'Other sources of information and advice', below.

Stage 3 - Consideration by a complaints review panel

- If your concern has already been through Stages 1 and 2 and you are not happy with the outcome, we may agree to set up a complaints review panel to consider it. This is a formal process, and your ultimate recourse at school level. The Chair of Governors has discretion to agree to this form of meeting where he or she feels it would be helpful in resolving the complaint.

The purpose of this arrangement is to give your complaint a hearing in front of a panel of governors who have no prior knowledge of the details of the complaint and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice.

- The aim of a complaints review panel is to resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the parent. We recognise, however, that it may sometimes only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken your complaint seriously.

The complaints review panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

1. The Clerk to the Governing Body will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within **20 working days**.

2. The Clerk will ask you whether you wish to provide any **further written documentation** in support of your complaint. You can include witness statements, or ask witnesses to give evidence in person, if you wish.
3. The Headteacher will be asked to prepare a **written report** for the panel. Other members of staff directly involved in matters raised in your complaint will also be asked to prepare reports or statements.
4. The clerk will inform you, the Headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the panel by letter, at least **five working days** in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting. We hope that you will feel comfortable with the meeting taking place in the College; but we will do what we can to make alternative arrangements if you prefer.
5. With the letter, the Clerk will send you all relevant correspondence, reports and documentation about the complaint and ask whether you wish to submit **further written evidence** to the panel.
6. The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and the Clerk will also inform you that **you are entitled to be accompanied** to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the College. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.
7. With the agreement of the Chair of the panel, the Headteacher may invite **members of staff** directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting,
8. The Chair of the panel will bear in mind that the formal nature of the meeting can be intimidating for you and will do his or her best to **put you at your ease**.
9. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses **previously undisclosed** should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
10. The Chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly **minuted**. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.
11. Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent to you, should give you all the information you require. If, however, you feel that you would like to have a **copy of the minutes** it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the Clerk can then be asked maintain confidentiality in the minutes.
12. During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:
 - you to explain your complaint;
 - you to hear the College's response from the Headteacher;
 - you to question the Headteacher about the complaint;
 - you to be questioned by the Headteacher about the complaint;
 - the panel members to be able to question you and the Headteacher;
 - any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to the Chair's approval) and all parties to have the right to question all witnesses;
 - you and the Headteacher to make a final statement.
13. In closing the meeting, the Chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to the Headteacher and

yourself **within two weeks**. All participants other than the panel and the Clerk will then leave.

14. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
 - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the complaint;
 - decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 - recommend, where appropriate, to the Governing Body, changes to the College's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
15. The Clerk will send you and the Headteacher a written statement outlining the decision of the panel **within two weeks**. The letter will explain what further recourse, beyond the Governing Body, is available to you.
16. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the College's records but separate from students' personal records.

Other sources of information and advice

If your concern is about an aspect of **special needs provision**, which might include information about relevant voluntary organisations and support groups in Essex, you might like to talk to their **Parent Partnership** team on their helpline: **01245 436036**.

The Government has announced, in its Education White Paper, Autumn 2010, that it is intending to set up formal appeals arrangements beyond the Governing Body. The College's complaints documentation will be updated accordingly once these arrangements are in place.

Meanwhile, there is no formal recourse beyond the Governing Body. A complaint may be made to the Secretary of State for Education if a person believes that a governing body or LA is acting "unreasonably," or is failing to carry out its statutory duties properly. The complainant should set out fully the concerns and reasons why the complaint is being submitted, enclosing all previous correspondence relevant to the complaint. The address is:

The Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
LONDON
SW1P 3BT