



EPSOM

COLLEGE

Complaints Procedure for Parents

Introduction

Epsom College has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the College with care and in accordance with the procedure described below. This document is available on request (and via the College website) to parents and guardians of current pupils, and parents of prospective pupils.

If a decision has been made to suspend a pupil for more than eleven days, a pupil is expelled or required to leave the school permanently then the Exclusions, Removal and Review Policy should be followed.

In this procedure "**Parent/s**" includes a current parent or legal guardian or education guardian of a pupil currently registered at the College and includes a parent whose child has recently left the College if the complaint was raised when the pupil was still registered at the College. This procedure is not available for use by prospective parents.

What constitutes a Complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific department, or about an individual member of staff. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, or failed to do so something that it should have done or acted unfairly.

Parents can be assured that all complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The school is here for their child and they can be assured that their child will not be penalised for a complaint that they raise in good faith.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively and in a timely manner.

The College shall aim to resolve informal complaints made under Stage 1 within six school working days.

Formal complaints made under Stage 2 will be acknowledged within six school working days if received during term time, and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. The College shall aim to resolve formal complaints within 22 school working days of receipt of the complaint or as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

The College will aim to conclude Stage 3, the Complaints Panel Hearing, within 28 school working days of receipt of the request for a Hearing, if the appeal is lodged during term-time, and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

At any stage, where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay, the parents will be notified of this and informed of the new timescales as soon as possible.

When we refer to "**school working days**", we mean Monday to Saturday, when the College is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the College's website.

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this will be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of this policy.

Recording Complaints

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints and whether they are resolved at Stage 1, Stage 2 or proceed to a panel hearing (Stage 3) and the action taken by the College as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice for Parents, a copy of which can be found on the College's website or by clicking [here](#). When dealing with complaints the College (including any panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes of the Panel Hearing, any recommendations made by the Panel and any subsequent actions taken by the College
- Separate records will be made of any complaints relating to boarding, along with any recommendations made by the Panel and subsequent actions taken by the College.

Records may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the College's Privacy Notice, but potentially including sensitive data such as information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

The College will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice but in most cases for a period of at least six years after the pupil leaves the School.

All records relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to where requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector, there may be other circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is required, for example, where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (e.g. in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain records as confidential.

If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their child's Form Tutor in the Lower School/ or Housemaster/mistress in the Senior School. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Tutor/ Housemaster/mistress cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult the Second Master or a member of SLT.

Stage 1 — Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint that is not resolved by contacting and discussing with their child's Form Tutor/ Housemaster/mistress, parents should contact the Second Master or the relevant member of SLT.
- Complaints made directly to the Head will usually be referred to the relevant member of SLT unless the Head deems it appropriate for him to deal with the matter personally.
- The member of SLT will make a written record of all complaints and the date on which they were received. The College will aim to resolve informal complaints within six working days, but should the matter not be resolved within twelve school working days, or in the event that the member of SLT failing to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.
- If, however, the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chairman of Governors who is contactable via the Bursar's office.

Stage 2 — Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head, who will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head will speak to the parents concerned, normally within six school working days, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations.
- The Head will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing within twenty-two school working days of the Head receiving the complaint. The Head will also give reasons for his decision.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the Chairman of Governors, or their nominee, will call for a full report from the Head and for all the relevant documents. The Chairman, or their nominee, may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chairman, or their nominee, is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chairman, or their nominee, will give reasons for their decision.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 — Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Chairman who will, on behalf of the Board of Governors, appoint a Governor with the relevant skills and expertise to convene a Complaints Panel Hearing. If the complaint is regarding the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman will on behalf of the Board of Governors, appoint a Governor with the relevant skills and expertise to convene a Complaints Panel Hearing. A parent may request a review by the Governors of the Head's decision to suspend a pupil for more than eleven days, to expel them, or to require their removal from the school. Such a review would be carried out by a Governors' Review Panel as detailed in Exclusions, Removal and Review Policy.

- The request for a Complaints Panel Hearing must be made by the parents within six school working days of the conclusion of Stage 2 above.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors. The Chair of Governors will appoint one Panel member to act as Chair of the Panel. The Panel will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable, but within twenty-two school working days.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than two school working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied at the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- The remit of the panel will be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.
- A contemporaneous minute of the Hearing will be taken and those present may make their own handwritten notes. No recording of the Hearing by any electronic or digital means shall be permitted.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to:
 - i. Dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
 - ii. uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
 - iii. make recommendations.
- The panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it within six school working days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person complained of. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations will be kept in the College and be available for inspection at any time by the Governors and the Head.

8 Complaints were recorded under Stage 2 (Formal Resolution) and one complaint was recorded under Stage 3 (Panel Hearing) of this formal Complaints Procedure for the preceding academic year (2023-24).