



Complaints Policy

Introduction, Guiding Principles and Stages of Complaint

At Abbey College we are committed to meeting the needs of our students. However, we recognise that not everything goes well for everybody all of the time. There are times when misunderstandings, confusion or genuine concerns give rise to complaints. The intention of this policy is to provide a clear and transparent process that will enable such complaints to be dealt with promptly, fairly and proportionately.

For the purposes of this policy, a "parent" shall include a guardian, carer or any other person with parental responsibility for a child at the College. This policy applies to complaints from parents of current pupils and to parents of former pupils if the complaint was initially raised whilst the pupil was on the College roll.

This policy has been approved by the Senior Leadership Team and is available on the College's website or on request from the College. It can be made available in large print or another more accessible format, if required. If assistance is needed with making a complaint, for example because of a disability, a parent should contact the College on 01684 892300 so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

Separate procedures apply if the Principal excludes or asks a pupil to leave and a parent seeks a review by the College Directors. These procedures are covered in the Exclusions policy, which is also available on the College website.

All College staff are made aware of this Complaints policy and are expected to familiarise themselves with the procedures for dealing with complaints to ensure they can be of most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

The College's guiding principles in complaint resolution are:

- to give careful and prompt consideration to all complaints
- to seek to achieve a just and fair outcome, taking due account of all relevant evidence
- to attempt to resolve complaints through dialogue and mutual understanding, and at as early a stage as possible

This policy outlines three stages of complaint:

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

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Where timescales are given in “working days”, this is defined as Monday - Friday during term time (the dates of which are available on the College website). Complaints received during holiday periods will be dealt with as soon as is practicable but are likely to take longer to resolve due to the unavailability of relevant staff. Under such circumstances the complainant will be notified of any extension to the time scales and the reason(s) why an extension is necessary when the complaint is acknowledged.

If a parent wishes to know the number of formal complaints received in the preceding academic year, this information is available on the College’s website.

Stage 1: Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns can be resolved quickly and informally. A parent with cause for concern or complaint should feel free to talk directly to a member of staff, to telephone, or write with the details of the issue that concerns them. In the first instance, it is usually best to address a concern to the Class Tutor, as they are often best placed to resolve the matter quickly. The parent may also refer a matter to the Principal, either directly or after an initial discussion with the class teacher or Class Tutor.

We will acknowledge (by telephone, email or by letter) a written notification of a concern within two working days of receipt. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the appropriate member of staff will arrange to speak with the complainant or invite them to a meeting within five working days of acknowledgement. This meeting may prompt further investigation or wider consultation but, in any event, this stage of the complaint’s process should be completed within 10 working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days of acknowledgement or in the event that the parent and member of staff fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the parent will be advised to proceed with the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2: Formal Resolution

Formal complaints will be acknowledged, in writing, by the Principal within two days of being received. In most cases, the Principal will meet or speak to the parent concerned to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary, however, for the Principal to conduct an investigation. Once the Principal is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and the parent will be informed of this decision in writing, no later than 15 working days after the formal complaint was acknowledged. The Principal will give reasons for the decision reached.

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Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept. The complainant will be informed if, due to exceptional circumstances, any additional time is necessary to complete the investigation.

If the parent is still not satisfied with the decision, he/she should proceed to Stage 3 of the complaints procedure.

Alternative Procedure for Handling Formal Complaints about the Principal

A parent wishing to make a complaint about the Principal may do so by writing to the College Director, via the school's address (College Director, Abbey College, 253, Wells Road, Malvern Wells, Worcestershire). The Director will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within two working days, indicating what action is being taken and the likely time scale. The procedures and time scales that apply to any other formal complaint (see above) will be followed.

If the parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to a Complaints Panel under Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3: Panel Hearing

If the parent wishes to proceed to Stage 3 (following a failure to reach a resolution earlier in the complaints process) they should write to the College Director, who is responsible for making the arrangements for a Panel Hearing, at the College address. In the written request for a Panel Hearing, the parent should state the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired. He/she should also send a list of all the documents that they believe to be in the College's possession that they consider relevant in the matter and that they wish the Panel to see. Copies of all such documents shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days before the hearing.

The College Director will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within five working days and will schedule a meeting of the Panel within 10 working days thereafter. The Panel appointed by the College Director will consist of at least three people not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the College. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend or relative, but legal representation is not usually appropriate.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent's 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 the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel will reach a decision. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations shall be confirmed in writing to the parent and, where relevant, to the person complained about within five working days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations will be available for inspection on the College premises by the Principal and the College Director.

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Record Keeping and Confidentiality

A written record will be kept by the Principal of all formal complaints, including any action(s) taken by the College as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it is upheld), and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or progressed to a panel hearing.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except as required by the school by paragraph 33 (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014; namely, where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where any other legal obligations prevail. Records of individual complaints will be retained at least until the College's next inspection thereafter, in accordance with data protection principles, only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

The Senior Leadership Team will maintain oversight of these records in order to determine the appropriate implementation of this policy and to respond to any patterns of complaints which may be apparent.

Anonymous Complaints

The College will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Principal or College Director, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants investigation.

Managing Serial and Persistent Complaints

The College will do its utmost to be helpful to people who contact the college with a complaint, concern or request for information.

However, there may be occasions when, despite all stages of the complaints procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant attempts to re-open the same issue, the College will inform them that the procedure has been completed and that the matter is now closed.

If the complainant contacts the College again on the same issue, the correspondence may then be viewed as serial or persistent and the School may choose not to respond. However, this will not occur until the complainant has completed the three stages of the complaints procedure.

The application of a serial or persistent designation for a complaint will be against the subject of the complaint rather than the complainant themselves.

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Monitoring and Review of complaints Policy Procedures

The Principal will monitor the number and type of complaints received and the operation of the procedures set out in this policy. They will also review the policy at least annually to ensure it meets statutory requirements and continues to reflect best practice.

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