



COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

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| Reviewed By: | Bursar |
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All pupils, parents and other individuals are entitled to bring a complaint against any aspect of school life and to expect that such complaints are dealt with swiftly and fairly and in accordance with the ACAS Code of Practice 2015 and Independent School Standards 2014.

Dover College is committed to deal with such matters without unreasonable delay. Whilst a complainant is not obliged to raise the matter in writing, it is desirable that this should be the case, in order to ensure full and correct documentation.

Where practicable, different individuals will carry out any investigation or formal hearing.

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION

Dover College has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if pupils or parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with this procedure.

In accordance with Schedule 7 to the Education (Independent School Standards (England) Regulations 2014, Dover College has a Complaints Procedure which is outlined to all pupils in the Prep Diary and which highlights the routes they can follow if they feel that they are fed up or unhappy, if they feel they are being treated unfairly, if they are being

bullied, if there are problems at home, if they are being subject to physical mistreatment (this list is non-exhaustive).

The College's Complaints Policy is applicable to all pupils in the School including those in the EYFS and to parents. (For the purpose of our Complaints Policy and Procedures the term parents includes guardians and the parents of prospective pupils.)

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 something that it should have done, or acted unfairly.

TIMETABLE

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. The school endeavours to acknowledge a notification by telephone, fax, email or letter within five working days if received during term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible. The School's target is to have completed the first two stages of the procedure within 28 days if the complaint is lodged during term-time, with Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, to be completed within a further 28 days. If a complaint is made during a school holiday, the complaint will be acknowledged within ten working days but any investigation or resolution and associated timescales will not commence until the School returns for the next academic term.

PARENTS

A vital aspect of working in a close partnership with parents is the need to know when things are, in the view of parents, not going right. If you have any concerns about any aspect of your child's life at school, please contact an appropriate member of staff as soon as possible. The College takes all such expressions of concern seriously and follow them up courteously and promptly. In any school things can go wrong but the College wants to do all it can to sort those things out. Two things tend to make parents and pupils reluctant to express concerns:

- A fear that the school will not see the issue to be important: please be assured, if it is important to you, it is important to the College.
- A fear that a concern or complaint may lead to repercussions for the pupil

Please be assured that under no circumstances will the school discriminate against a pupil because of expressions of concern or complaints. The College is very experienced in ensuring that, if other pupils are involved (e.g. in an allegation of bullying), there are no repercussions from other quarters.

RECORDING COMPLAINTS

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints and whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. A written record will also be kept of action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

At the school's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- Name of pupil
- Description of the matter leading to the complaint
- Records of the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member(s) of staff handling the matter at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the matter (including emails and records of phone conversations).

Three complaints were registered under the formal procedure during the 2019/20 academic year.

GENERAL PROCEDURE FOR ALL COMPLAINTS

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and considered on an informal basis. In the first instance the following are the appropriate points of contact:

- For a minor day-to-day issue, please contact the relevant teacher, tutor or, if it is an issue to do with boarding, the housemaster or housemistress
- For a more serious subject-related academic concern, the Deputy Head should be contacted
- For a more serious pastoral matter, the Deputy Head
- For concerns relating to boarding please contact the Deputy Head or the Housemaster or Housemistress
- For concerns about the curriculum, please contact the Deputy Head

- For academic or curriculum based concerns in the Prep School, please contact the Deputy Head of the Prep School
- For pastoral concerns in the Prep School, please contact the Deputy Head of the Prep School
- For any other pastoral or disciplinary concerns, please contact the Deputy Head
- In matters regarding finance, fees and non-academic services please contact the Bursar
- In the event that the complaint is against the Headmaster, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chairman of Governors or, in his absence, to another senior member of Council.

The College does all it can to ensure that it responds to concerns in a highly professional manner. However, if you feel that an expression of concern has not been handled properly by a member of staff, please contact either the Deputy Head or Head of the Prep School.

The member of staff concerned makes a written record of every concern; this record includes the date on which the concern was received. The College endeavours to acknowledge a written notification by telephone, fax, e-mail or letter within five working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable in the School holidays. Should the matter not be resolved within a reasonable period (one not normally exceeding two term-time weeks) or in the event that the relevant staff and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with a written complaint by writing directly to the Headmaster.

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

If you remain dissatisfied, please contact the Headmaster; this must be in writing. You should send full written details of the nature of the complaint, any relevant documents and full contact details in an envelope addressed to the Headmaster. It would be very helpful if you could also indicate what you envisage as the desired outcome.

The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, upon the appropriate course of action and may ask to meet you for a discussion about the problem, normally within ten days of receiving the complaint (during term time). The Headmaster may conduct a full investigation of the complaint and may interview any members of staff or pupils involved. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. You will receive a written response to your complaint.

It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations that may delay a resolution. The Headmaster may ask a senior member of staff to act as investigator and may involve one or more members of the Council. Written records are kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. Once the Headmaster is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents informed of this decision in writing (within a further 14 working days after the initial discussion). The Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision.

Stage 3 - Panel Hearing

If, having discussed the matter with the Headmaster, you still feel dissatisfied please contact the Chairman of Council (via the Bursar who is the Clerk to the Governors) who will convene a panel of at least two members of Council and one person independent of the management and running of the College to consider the complaint. No member of the panel may have any involvement with any matter detailed in the complaint. You can write to the Chairman in confidence via the Clerk to the Governors, who will acknowledge requests within 5 working days.

If possible, the Panel will resolve a parental complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel decides how it should be carried out.

At the Panel Hearing, the complainant(s) may be accompanied by one other person e.g. a relative or friend. Legal representation is only permitted if the Chairman of the Panel considers it appropriate. If it is considered appropriate, the Chairman informs the complainant(s) to that effect so that they may choose to be legally represented at the Panel Hearing if they so wish. Should they decide to be so represented, they shall inform the Chairman at least seven days before the date set for the Panel Hearing that that is their intention. If the complainant(s) choose to be legally represented the Chairman notifies the other parties of that decision to enable them to have legal representation at the Panel Hearing should they so wish.

After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel should reach a decision and may make recommendations; this should be completed within seven days of the meeting or Hearing, or as soon as is reasonably practicable given a particular set of circumstances. The Chairman of the Panel will write to the complainant(s) informing them of the Panel's decision and the reasons for it within seven days of reaching this decision. The Panel's findings and any recommendations are sent in writing to the parents, the Headmaster, Members of Council and, where relevant, the person(s) about whom the complaint was made. The decision of the Panel is final.

The findings are then made available for inspection on the premises by the proprietors and the Headmaster.

GENERAL

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints are treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records are kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under Section 106 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, as amended, requests access to them, or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Parents are always welcome to address their serious concerns on any matter to the College. Written records of all serious complaints and their outcomes (including at what stage they were resolved) are kept and reviewed at least annually by the Headmaster, the Bursar and the Deputy Heads as appropriate.

In the event that a written complaint is made relating to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision, investigation must be carried out under the Statutory Framework for the EYFS and complainants notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint. Dover College will provide ISI / OFSTED, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept for at least 3 years. Parents may complain directly to OFSTED or to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements.

Boarders and their parents are entitled to contact ISI or OFSTED at any time if they have concerns about welfare. All concerns and complaints relating to any boarding matters will be fully dealt with in accordance with this policy. Concerns may also be raised with the Local Authority Designated Office (LADO) at the Kent Safeguarding Children Board. The College maintains a record of all complaints for at least three years.

Any parent is entitled to contact the ISI (details below) on any area of concern.

CONTACT DETAILS

OFSTED Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA
Tel: 0300 123 1231
Online: <https://contact.ofsted.gov.uk/contact-form>

ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
9 - 12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA
Telephone: +44 (0)207 600 0100
Email: concerns@isi.net

Local Authority Designated Officer for Kent (LADO)

Telephone: 03000 41 08 88

Email address: kentchildrenslado@kent.gov.uk