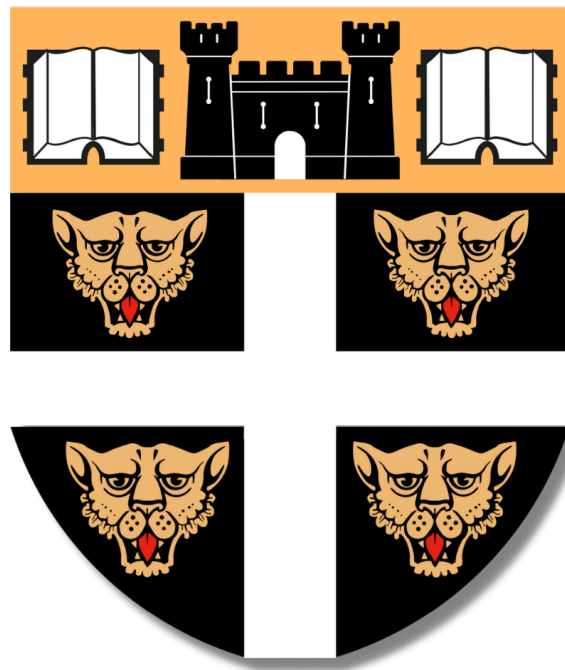


Parental Complaints Policy and Procedure

Dover College



Owner:	Headmaster	Date: August 2026
Approved By:	Chair of Council	Date: August 2026
Review Frequency	Annual	
Last reviewed on:	August 2026	
Next review due by:	August 2027	

INTRODUCTION

Any matter about which a parent is dissatisfied and seeks action by the College falls within the scope of this procedure, unless it is subject to a separate statutory, contractual or school procedure.

Separate arrangements apply to complaints or concerns raised directly by pupils, including boarders; admissions concerns raised by prospective parents; employment grievances; and concerns which are subject to a separate statutory or contractual process.

This procedure applies to complaints made by parents of current pupils concerning the education, welfare or other provision made for their child by Dover College.

Although this procedure is made available to prospective parents, it is available for use only by parents of current pupils. Concerns about the admissions process should be raised in accordance with the College's Admissions Policy. The College's Complaints Policy is applicable to all pupils in the School including those in the EYFS and boarding and to parents. (For the purpose of our Complaints Policy and Procedures the term parents includes guardians and the parents of prospective pupils.)

Complaints from parents of former pupils will normally be considered under this procedure only where the complaint was first raised while the pupil remained registered at the College.

Exclusion reviews have their own review procedure. They sit outside this policy and the review decision is final.

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

Dover 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 School in accordance with this procedure. Please be assured that under no circumstances will the school discriminate against a pupil because of expressions of concern or complaints.

The number of complaints registered in the 2025-26 school year is available, without charge, from the School Office.

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.

MATTERS HANDLED UNDER OTHER PROCEDURES

Some matters may require other processes, including:

- safeguarding and child-protection concerns
- allegations against adults working with children
- staff grievances and employment matters
- whistleblowing by staff
- admissions decisions
- exclusion or required removal, depending on the College's chosen arrangements
- data-subject rights requests
- decisions by external examining bodies
- services delivered entirely by independent third-party providers

Where a complaint includes matters falling under more than one procedure, the College will determine the most appropriate way to address them and will explain this to the parent. Using another procedure will not improperly prevent the parent from completing this Complaints Procedure in relation to matters that remain within its scope.

For safeguarding matters, the College may need to suspend or modify the complaints investigation while a statutory agency considers the underlying matter. The parent should be told why the complaints process cannot yet progress and kept informed where possible.

Data protection complaints

A complaint concerning the College's processing of personal data may be raised through this procedure or directly with the College's Data Protection Lead. The College will ensure that the data protection element of any complaint is identified, acknowledged and handled in accordance with section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018.

The College will facilitate the making of data protection complaints, including through an electronic contact route, acknowledge them within the statutory period, investigate them without undue delay and communicate the outcome.

Where data protection concerns form part of a wider parental complaint, the College may deal with the matters together, provided that all applicable data protection requirements are met. A parent will not be prevented from using this procedure merely because the complaint also involves personal data.

TIMETABLE

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. Complaints have up to three possible stages.

Stage 1

- The school endeavours to acknowledge a Stage 1 complaint within **five working days**.
- The school seeks to resolve and give an outcome within **10 working days**.
- Where this is not possible, the reason should be explained and a revised date provided.

Stage 2

- The parent escalates to Stage 2 within **10 working days** of the Stage 1 outcome, in writing to the Headmaster, clearly stating that this is a Stage 2 complaint.
- The school endeavours to acknowledge a Stage 2 complaint within **five working days**.
- Any meeting or initial discussion will normally take place within **10 working days**.
- Final written decision will normally be provided within **20 working days** of receiving the formal complaint or any reasonably requested clarification.

Stage 3

- The parent requests a panel within **10 working days** of receiving the Stage 2 decision. This is to be in writing to the Chair of Council, clearly stating that this is a Stage 3 complaint.
- The school endeavours to acknowledge a Stage 3 complaint within **five working days**.
- The hearing will normally take place within **20 working days** of receiving a complete Stage 3 request.
- Panel papers are distributed at least **five working days** before the hearing.
- Any companion's identity will be notified at least **five working days** before the hearing.
- Written findings and recommendations are issued within **five working days** of the hearing, unless further investigation is needed.

The College is mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Although a Stage 2 complaint must normally be made in writing, the College offers reasonable assistance where a parent is unable to formulate a written complaint because of disability, language or another substantial difficulty. A parent who has difficulty making a complaint in writing should contact the School Office, which will arrange appropriate assistance. Any resulting written record will be agreed with the parent before being treated as the formal complaint.

For the purposes of the stage-specific timescales in this procedure, a working day means a weekday during College term time, excluding bank holidays and half-term.

Complaints received during school holidays will be acknowledged as soon as reasonably practicable and normally within ten weekdays. It may take longer to investigate or convene meetings during holiday periods, but the College will take reasonable steps to avoid undue delay and will provide the parent with an indicative timetable.

The College may extend a timescale where there are exceptional circumstances, significant disruption, unavoidable absence or a need for further investigation. Where it does so, it will explain the reason and provide a revised target date.

The term-time definition does not override any applicable statutory deadline, including the 28-day EYFS complaint period or requirements relating to data protection complaints.

Where the College has completed all stages of this procedure and a parent repeatedly seeks to reopen the same matter without raising substantively new information, the College may

inform the parent that the procedure is complete and that it will not enter into further correspondence about the same complaint.

The College may also introduce proportionate communication arrangements where the frequency, volume, tone or nature of communications is causing significant disruption or adversely affecting members of the College community. Such arrangements will not prevent the College from considering genuinely new concerns, safeguarding matters or information that it is legally required to address.

Length and format of formal complaints

The College asks parents to present complaints clearly and concisely so that the matters raised can be identified, investigated and resolved fairly and without unnecessary delay.

A complaint submitted at Stage 2 should normally be no more than 2,000 words. A request to proceed to Stage 3 should normally be no more than 1,500 words and should explain which aspects of the Stage 2 decision remain disputed, the reasons for the parent's continuing dissatisfaction and the outcome sought.

These indicative limits do not include reasonably necessary supporting documents which already exist, such as relevant correspondence, reports or records. Supporting material should be directly relevant, clearly labelled and, where appropriate, arranged in date order. Parents should not use appendices to repeat or materially expand their written submissions.

Where a submission substantially exceeds the indicative limit, the College may ask the parent to provide a shorter and more focused version or to identify the principal issues requiring determination. The original date of submission will be preserved, provided that the parent supplies the requested clarification within the reasonable period specified by the College.

The College will not refuse to consider a complaint solely because it exceeds the indicative word limit. The College may allow a longer submission where the complexity, seriousness or particular circumstances of the complaint make this reasonable. Requests for an extended limit should be made as soon as possible and should explain briefly why additional length is required.

The College will make reasonable adjustments where required, including where disability, language needs or other significant circumstances affect a parent's ability to present the complaint within the normal format.

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:

- the pupil's teacher, tutor or houseparent for most day-to-day concerns;

- the relevant Head of Department or senior leader for a more serious or unresolved matter;
- the Director of Finance and Operations for fees and non-academic services;
- the Headmaster for serious or unresolved matters;
- the Clerk to Council for complaints about the Headmaster or governors.
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An appropriate record will be made of informal complaints and concerns where necessary, including where the matter is significant, recurring, safeguarding-related, relates to boarding, or requires follow-up action.

Stage 2 - Formal Resolution

If you remain dissatisfied of any Stage 1 resolution, please contact the Headmaster within ten days to escalate matters to Stage 2; this must be in writing. You should send full written details of the nature of the complaint, any relevant documents and full contact details, clearly stating that this is a Stage 2 complaint. It would be 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.

The Headmaster will normally determine the Stage 2 complaint. The Headmaster may appoint an appropriately senior and impartial person to investigate and/or determine the complaint where this is necessary or appropriate. The decision-taker must not have been materially involved in the matters complained of and should be senior to any staff member whose conduct is under consideration.

It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations that may delay a resolution. 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 **20 working days** of receiving the formal complaint or any reasonably requested clarification). The Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision and information about Stage 3 and its deadline. The College need not disclose confidential staff disciplinary action or sensitive information concerning other pupils.

If the Stage 2 complaint is about the Headmaster, the Stage 2 complaint must be sent to the Chair of Council, who will appoint an uninvolved person to determine Stage 2.

If the Stage 2 complaint is about the Chair of Council, the Stage 2 complaint must be sent to the Vice-Chair (or another uninvolved governor), either directly or via the Headmaster. The Vice-Chair (or another uninvolved governor) will commission an appropriate decision-maker.

Stage 3 - Panel Hearing

If, having discussed the matter with the Headmaster, parents still feel dissatisfied they should contact the Chair of Council within ten days, outlining they remain dissatisfied, which aspects of the Stage 2 decision they wish the Panel to consider and the outcome they are seeking. The Chair of Council will convene a panel to consider the complaint.

The hearing will normally take place within **20 working days** of receiving a complete Stage 3 request.

The Panel will consist of at least three persons who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. At least one member will be independent of the management and running of the College.

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.

Parents may attend and be accompanied by one other person, such as a relative or friend, they shall inform the Chair at least five working days before the date set for the Panel Hearing that that is their intention. Legal representation will not ordinarily be appropriate. A request for a lawyer to attend must be made in writing in advance and will be considered only where the College is satisfied that exceptional circumstances make this necessary for a fair hearing.

If the parent chooses not to attend, or is unable or unwilling to attend after reasonable arrangements have been offered, the Panel will still meet and consider the complaint in accordance with this procedure.

A note-taker may attend. The note will not be a verbatim transcript but will be intended to provide an accurate record of the principal matters discussed. It will be circulated to the attendees as soon as reasonably practicable. Any disagreement about accuracy will be considered by the Panel Chair, and unresolved comments may be appended to the final note.

After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel should reach a decision and may make recommendations; this should be completed within five working days of the meeting or Hearing, or as soon as is reasonably practicable given a particular set of circumstances.

The Panel may:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part; and/or
- make recommendations for consideration by the College.

The Chair of the Panel will write to the complainant(s) informing them of the Panel's decision and the reasons for it. The Panel's findings and any recommendations are sent in writing to the parents, the Headmaster (or Stage 2 decision maker), 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 relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or an inspecting body under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, or where disclosure is otherwise required or permitted by a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation.

Parents are always welcome to address their concerns on any matter to the College. Written records of all complaints from Stage 2 onwards and their outcomes (including at what stage they were resolved) are kept and reviewed at least annually by the Headmaster, the Director of Finance and Operations and the Deputy Heads as appropriate.

In the event that a written complaint is made relating to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) provision, the investigation must be carried out under the Statutory Framework for the EYFS and complainants notified of the outcome of the investigation within 28 calendar days of having received the complaint. This statutory period continues during school holidays. 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. Records may be retained for longer where the complaint has safeguarding implications, legal proceedings are contemplated or underway, or another legal or regulatory obligation applies. Parents may complain directly to OFSTED or to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements.

External Bodies

ISI

020 7600 0100;

info@isi.net;

CAP House, 9–12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA.

Local Authority Designated Officer for Kent (LADO)

<https://www.kscmp.org.uk/procedures/local-authority-designated-officer-lado>

OFSTED

0300 123 1231;

enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk