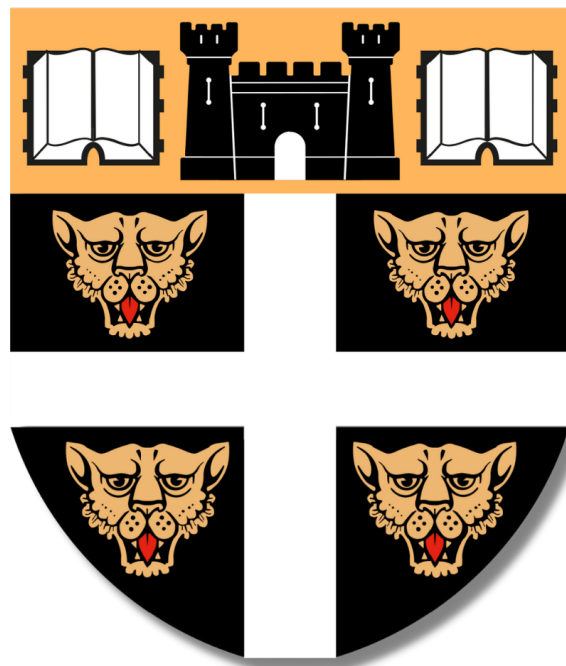


# Pupil and Boarder Complaints/Concerns Policy and Procedure

Dover College



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|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Owner:              | Headmaster       | Date: August 2026 |
| Approved By:        | Chair of Council | Date: August 2026 |
| Review Frequency    | Annual           |                   |
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## **1. Purpose**

Dover College wants every pupil to feel safe, listened to and able to speak openly when something is wrong.

This procedure explains how pupils can raise a concern or make a complaint about any aspect of their experience at the College. It applies to all pupils, including pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage, the Prep School, the Senior School, the Sixth Form and boarding.

A pupil does not have to use the word “complaint” or follow a particular form of words. If a pupil tells a member of staff that they are unhappy, worried, feel unsafe or believe that something is unfair or wrong, the member of staff will listen and help the pupil obtain the appropriate support.

This procedure is intended to:

- make it easy for pupils to raise concerns
- ensure that concerns and complaints are taken seriously
- provide clear and accessible ways to seek help
- resolve matters fairly and as quickly as reasonably possible
- ensure that pupils receive appropriate support
- enable the College to learn from complaints and improve its provision

Parents wishing to make a complaint in their own right should use the College’s Parental Complaints Policy and Procedure. A pupil may ask a parent, guardian, educational guardian, advocate or another trusted adult to help them raise a concern.

## **2. What can a pupil complain about?**

A pupil may raise a concern or complaint about anything connected with their life at the College, including:

- the way they have been treated by another pupil or an adult
- bullying, discrimination, harassment or unkind behaviour
- something that makes them feel unsafe, worried or uncomfortable
- teaching, learning, academic support or assessment
- pastoral care or support
- boarding accommodation, routines, food, privacy or welfare
- school or boarding rules and the way they have been applied
- a sanction or decision which the pupil believes is unfair
- facilities, activities, trips, medical care or other services
- the College’s response to an earlier concern
- something which the College has done, or has failed to do
- any other aspect of school or boarding life about which the pupil is unhappy and would like the College to take action

This list is not exhaustive.

A pupil may raise a concern about something affecting them personally or something they have seen or heard which may be affecting another pupil.

## **3. Our commitments to pupils**

The College will:

- listen to the pupil and take their concern seriously

- treat the pupil with respect and kindness
- ensure that the pupil is not punished, disadvantaged or treated differently for raising a genuine concern or complaint
- provide help so that the pupil can explain what has happened
- make reasonable adjustments for age, disability, additional needs, language or communication difficulties
- consider the pupil's wishes and feelings
- explain what will happen next
- take immediate action where there may be a risk to safety or welfare
- investigate the matter fairly and impartially
- provide an appropriate response
- keep the pupil informed, so far as reasonably possible
- identify any lessons or improvements arising from the complaint

A concern which is not upheld, or which results from a misunderstanding, will not lead to the pupil being punished. However, a pupil who is found deliberately and maliciously to have made a knowingly false allegation may be dealt with under the College's Behaviour Policy. The fact that a complaint has not been upheld does not, by itself, mean that it was knowingly false or malicious.

#### **4. When should a pupil speak up?**

Pupils are encouraged to raise concerns as soon as they feel able to do so. Speaking promptly can make it easier for the College to understand what has happened and provide help.

There is no fixed time limit preventing a pupil from raising a concern. The College will still listen if the matter happened some time ago, particularly where the pupil did not previously feel able to speak about it.

#### **5. How to raise a concern or complaint**

A pupil may speak to any adult at the College whom they trust. This might include:

- their teacher or tutor
- their Houseparent or another member of boarding staff
- the Head of the Prep School
- a Deputy Head
- the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead
- the School Nurse or another member of the medical team
- the Headmaster
- another member of staff with whom they feel comfortable
- the College's Independent Person

A pupil can raise a concern:

- by speaking to someone
- by writing a letter or note (either signed or confidential)
- by email
- by placing a note in the confidential concerns boxes located in each boarding house in and in the refectory
- Through using the confidential online 'Dover College Worry Box'. [dovercollege.org.uk/worry-box/](https://dovercollege.org.uk/worry-box/)
- through a parent, guardian, educational guardian, advocate, friend or trusted adult
- in any other way which enables the pupil to communicate what is worrying them.

Younger children and pupils who find communication difficult may express a concern through words, pictures, behaviour or another means of communication. Staff will help them to communicate their wishes and feelings.

The pupil does not have to write the complaint themselves. A member of staff or trusted adult may help them make a written record and should check with the pupil that the record accurately reflects what they wanted to say.

## **6. Anonymous concerns**

A pupil may raise a concern without giving their name via the routes above, including the confidential online 'Dover College Worry Box'. [dovercollege.org.uk/worry-box/](https://dovercollege.org.uk/worry-box/). The College will consider an anonymous concern and investigate it so far as reasonably possible.

It may be harder to investigate an anonymous concern or ask the pupil further questions. Where possible, pupils are therefore encouraged to identify themselves to a trusted adult. Their identity will be shared only where necessary.

A pupil who is worried about being identified should discuss this with a trusted adult or the Independent Person so that appropriate support and protection can be considered.

## **7. Safeguarding and urgent concerns**

A pupil should tell an adult immediately if:

- they or another child may be in danger
- someone has hurt them or another child
- someone has behaved towards them in a sexual, threatening, abusive or seriously inappropriate way
- they are being bullied or harassed
- they are frightened of an adult or another pupil
- they are worried that another pupil may harm themselves or someone else
- they have any other concern about a child's safety or welfare

A safeguarding concern will be dealt with immediately under the College's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy. The College will not wait for the stages of this procedure to be completed before taking protective action.

A pupil may report a safeguarding concern to any member of staff. The member of staff will pass it promptly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead or a Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Where the concern is about the conduct of a member of staff, volunteer, contractor, governor or another adult working with children, it must be reported to the Headmaster. A concern about the Headmaster must be reported to the Chair of Council. Appropriate safeguarding and allegations procedures will then be followed.

If somebody is in immediate danger, the pupil or an adult supporting them should call 999.

## **8. Support for the pupil**

A pupil may ask for help from:

- a trusted member of staff
- a parent, guardian or educational guardian
- the College's Independent Person
- a relative or family friend
- an advocate
- an interpreter or communication assistant

- a counsellor or medical professional
- another appropriate person

A pupil may be accompanied by a trusted person at a meeting about their complaint, unless there is a safeguarding or other compelling reason why that particular person should not attend. If this happens, the College will help the pupil identify another suitable person.

Where necessary, the College will arrange appropriate advocacy support, particularly for pupils who have additional needs or find it difficult to express their views.

## **9. Stage 1: speaking to someone and informal resolution**

Most concerns can be resolved promptly by speaking to a trusted adult.

The adult receiving the concern will:

1. listen carefully
2. reassure the pupil that they have done the right thing by speaking
3. establish whether anyone may be at immediate risk
4. make an appropriate written record
5. ask the pupil what they would like to happen
6. explain what the adult will need to do next
7. pass the concern to the person best placed to deal with it

The pupil will not be expected to confront the person about whom they are complaining.

The concern will normally be acknowledged within two working days and the College will normally seek to resolve it within five working days. Urgent safeguarding or welfare concerns will be acted upon immediately.

Where the concern cannot be resolved within five working days, the pupil will be told:

- what is happening
- who is dealing with the matter
- why more time is needed
- when a further update can be expected.

If the pupil remains unhappy, or the concern is sufficiently serious, it will move to Stage 2.

## **10. Stage 2: formal consideration**

A pupil may ask for their concern to be considered formally. A serious concern may also move directly to Stage 2 without first completing Stage 1.

The complaint will normally be considered by:

- the Deputy Head responsible for the relevant area
- the Head of the Prep School, where appropriate
- the Headmaster
- another suitably senior and impartial person appointed by the Headmaster.

The decision-maker must not be the person complained about and must not have been materially involved in the matter in a way which would prevent a fair consideration of the complaint.

The pupil will be helped to provide:

- a clear explanation of what happened
- the main points about which they are unhappy
- any information or evidence they would like considered
- what they would like the College to do

The pupil may attend a meeting and may be accompanied by a trusted person. The College may also speak to other people and consider relevant records.

The College will normally:

- acknowledge the formal complaint within two working days
- meet or speak with the pupil within five working days, where a meeting is appropriate
- provide an outcome within 10 working days of the complaint entering Stage 2

Where further investigation is required, the pupil will be told why additional time is needed and given a revised target date.

The response will explain, in language appropriate to the pupil:

- what matters were considered
- whether the complaint was upheld in whole, upheld in part or not upheld
- the reasons for the decision
- what action can appropriately be shared with the pupil
- any support that will be provided
- how the pupil may ask for a review

The College may be unable to share confidential information about another pupil or member of staff, including details of any disciplinary action. This does not mean that no action has been taken.

## **11. Stage 3: review**

If the pupil remains dissatisfied, they may ask for the Stage 2 decision to be reviewed.

The pupil should normally ask for a review within 10 working days of receiving the Stage 2 outcome. The College will consider a later request where the pupil had a good reason for not asking sooner.

The review will normally be carried out by:

- the Headmaster, where the Headmaster did not determine Stage 2;
- an uninvolved governor or another suitable person appointed by the Chair of Council, where the Headmaster determined Stage 2
- another appropriately senior and impartial person who has not previously been involved

The reviewer will consider:

- the pupil's original complaint
- the Stage 2 investigation and decision
- why the pupil remains dissatisfied
- any relevant information which was not previously considered
- whether the complaint was handled fairly and reached a reasonable outcome.

The reviewer may meet the pupil, speak to other people or request further information.

The review will normally be completed within 10 working days. If additional time is required, the pupil will be given an explanation and a revised target date.

The review decision will be final under this pupil procedure. This does not prevent a parent from using any applicable rights under the Parental Complaints Policy, nor does it prevent the College from acting on new safeguarding information.

## **12. Complaints about the Headmaster or governors**

A complaint about the Headmaster should be raised with the Chair of Council through the Bursar, whose details can always be found via the School Office. The pupil will be provided with suitable help to make contact with the Clerk or Chair and will not be expected to do so alone.

The Chair will arrange for the complaint to be considered by a suitable person who has not previously been involved.

A complaint about the Chair of Council should be sent to the Bursar and will be considered by the Vice-Chair or another uninvolved governor.

A complaint about the Chair and Vice-Chair together, or about Council collectively, will be considered under an appropriately impartial procedure arranged by the Bursar.

## **13. The Independent Person**

The College has appointed a person who is independent of the College's staff, leadership and governance whom boarders may contact about personal problems, concerns or complaints.

Dover College has identified Jo Irwin and Chris Scoble who boarders and day pupils may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. They are known as the 'independent listener'. Children know who these people are, know how to contact them and should feel comfortable talking to them. Jo Irwin and Chris Scoble are easily accessible.

Jo Irwin: 07796291851 [irwin6000@rocketmail.com](mailto:irwin6000@rocketmail.com)

Chris Scoble: 07988853730 [c\\_j\\_scoble@hotmail.com](mailto:c_j_scoble@hotmail.com)

Boarders may contact the Independent Person directly and in private. They do not need permission from a member of staff.

The Independent Person can:

- listen to the pupil
- help the pupil understand their options
- help the pupil express their wishes and feelings
- support the pupil in raising a concern or complaint
- help the pupil obtain other support where appropriate.

The Independent Person cannot promise to keep information secret where a child may be at risk of harm. Where possible, they will explain to the pupil before sharing information and will share it only with those who need to know.

Information about the Independent Person and how to contact them will be displayed prominently in each boarding house and provided to boarders during induction.

## **14. Outside help**

Pupils may seek help outside the College.

### *Childline*

Childline provides free, confidential help for children and young people about any concern, however large or small.

Telephone: 0800 1111

Website and online chat: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

### *Children's Commissioner: Help at Hand*

Help at Hand provides advice and assistance to children living away from home, including children at boarding schools.

Telephone: 0800 528 0731

Email: [help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](mailto:help.team@childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

Website: [www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand)

A pupil may also speak to:

- their parent, guardian or educational guardian
- a social worker
- the police
- a doctor or other health professional
- an advocate
- another trusted adult outside the College.

The College will not prevent or discourage a pupil from seeking appropriate outside help.

## **15. Confidentiality and information sharing**

Complaints will be handled sensitively. Information will be shared only with people who need it in order to:

- protect a pupil
- understand and investigate the concern
- provide a fair opportunity for those involved to respond
- provide appropriate support
- comply with a legal, safeguarding or regulatory duty
- take appropriate action

The College cannot promise absolute secrecy. If information suggests that a pupil or another person may be at risk, it must be shared with the Designated Safeguarding Lead or another appropriate person.

Where reasonably possible, the pupil will be told:

- what information needs to be shared
- who it will be shared with
- why it needs to be shared.

The College will consider the pupil's age, understanding, wishes and circumstances when deciding whether and how to involve their parents. There may be circumstances in which the College must inform a parent, safeguarding agency or another authority despite the pupil asking it not to do so.

## **16. Fairness to everyone involved**

The College will act fairly towards both the pupil making the complaint and any person about whom the complaint is made.

A person criticised in a complaint will normally be told enough about the concern to understand and respond to it. The College will take account of the age and vulnerability of the pupils involved and will not require a pupil to confront another pupil or adult.

Where different accounts cannot be fully reconciled, the College will make a decision on the information reasonably available.

No person who is the subject of the complaint will determine whether the complaint is upheld.

## **17. Withdrawing a complaint**

A pupil may say that they no longer wish to continue with a complaint.

The College will respect the pupil's wishes so far as reasonably possible. However, the College may need to continue considering the matter where:

- safeguarding or welfare concerns remain
- another pupil or person may be at risk
- the matter may affect other members of the College community
- a serious breach of College rules or legal obligations may have occurred
- there is another compelling reason to take further action

The College will explain this to the pupil and continue to provide support.

## **18. Records**

The College will make an appropriate written record of formal pupil complaints, which may include:

- the date the complaint was received
- the nature of the complaint
- the pupil's wishes and views
- the people involved in considering it
- action taken
- the outcome
- support provided
- whether the complaint was withdrawn
- any recommendations or lessons identified

Complaints relating to boarding provision will be clearly identified in the complaints record. The College will also record boarding complaints which are later withdrawn and the action taken in response, regardless of whether the complaint was upheld.

Safeguarding records will be maintained in accordance with the College's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.

Records will be stored securely and retained in accordance with the College's Data Protection Policy, Privacy Notice and Records Retention Policy.

Senior leaders and Council will review complaint records and emerging patterns at appropriate intervals. Information used for governance monitoring will normally be anonymised unless identification is necessary.

## **19. Accessibility and awareness**

The College will ensure that this procedure is:

- explained to pupils in age-appropriate language
- included in pupil and boarding induction
- available in boarding houses and appropriate communal areas
- accessible to pupils with special educational needs or disabilities
- supported by staff who understand how to respond when a pupil raises a concern

A simplified pupil summary is included below.

## **Pupil Summary: Something is Wrong - What Can I Do?**

If something is worrying you, feels unfair or makes you feel unsafe, tell someone.

You can speak to any adult you trust, including:

- your teacher or tutor
- your Houseparent
- a Deputy Head
- the Head of the Prep School
- the Designated Safeguarding Lead
- the School Nurse
- the Headmaster
- the Independent Person

You can speak, write a note, send an email, use the confidential online 'Dover College Worry Box'. [dovercollege.org.uk/worry-box/](https://dovercollege.org.uk/worry-box/) or ask someone else to help you.

You will not be punished for raising a genuine concern, even if the College later decides that no further action is needed.

You can ask to have a trusted person with you when you explain what has happened.

We will:

1. listen to you
2. check that you and others are safe
3. explain what will happen next
4. look into your concern fairly
5. tell you what we have decided, as far as we are able
6. help you if you are still worried

If you do not think your concern has been dealt with properly, you can ask a more senior person to look at it again.

Independent help for pupils, including boarders:

Jo Irwin: 07796291851 [irwin6000@rocketmail.com](mailto:irwin6000@rocketmail.com)

Chris Scoble: 07988853730 [c\\_j\\_scoble@hotmail.com](mailto:c_j_scoble@hotmail.com)

You can contact the Independent Person directly and privately. You do not need permission.

*Help outside the College*

Childline: 0800 1111

Help at Hand: 0800 528 0731

Emergency: 999

No concern is too small to mention. You will be listened to.