

## COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

2025/26

The difference between a concern and a complaint:

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. The college takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible. If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, or if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, you will be referred to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand, however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, we will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure. This does not cover exclusions, for which there is a separate procedure.

### **Stage 1 - Informal Resolution**

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns can be resolved quickly and informally.

If a parent/carer has a complaint they should contact the relevant Director of Studies or Head of Boarding in the first instance. If they cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary to check with the Head of School, Vice Principal or Principal.

If the Principal receives a complaint at this level he may pass this on to the most appropriate person to investigate with an aim of achieving a timely and effective resolution.

The Director of Studies or Head of Boarding will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. The college keeps the records of informal complaints to enable low-level patterns of concerns to be monitored. These records are kept in a centralised file.

Should the matter not be resolved within five working days (term time) or in the event that the Director of Studies or Head of Boarding and the parent/carer fail to reach a satisfactory



resolution then they will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Should the college feel able to offer a resolution this will be communicated to the parent/carer in writing. The parent/carer will have seven working days to respond. If no response is received, the matter will be considered closed.

### **Stage 2 - Formal Resolution**

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parent/carer should put their complaint in writing to the Principal who will consider the complaint and decide on the appropriate action.

In most cases the Principal will speak to, email or meet with the parent/carer concerned, as soon as possible to discuss the matter, but will always be within seven working days (term time) from receiving the formal complaint in writing. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. This will be communicated to the parent/carer in writing. The parent/carer will have seven working days to respond. If no response is received, the matter will be considered closed.

It may be necessary for the Principal to carry out further investigations. The Principal will keep a written record of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint in the central logs. 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 Principal will inform the parent/carer and give the reasons for the decision within 28 working days. The parent/carer will have seven working days to respond. If no response is received, the matter will be considered closed.

If the parent/carer is still not satisfied with the decision, they should go to Stage 3 of this procedure.

### **Stage 3 - Panel Hearing**

If the parent/carer seeks to invoke Stage 3 following a failure to reach an earlier resolution, the matter will be referred by the Principal to the Chair of Governors so he may form a Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will comprise of three people not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and one of those members will not be directly involved in the management and running of the college and completely independent of the proprietorial group. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair of Governors, who will chair the panel himself or appoint a chair from the panel selected.

The Chair of the Panel will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as is practicable but within 12 working days from the date when the Principal has received notification from the parent/carer that they wish to proceed with a stage 3 hearing.



Although legal representation is not normally appropriate at a panel hearing, the parent/carer may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative or friend. If possible the panel will resolve the parent/carer'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 all facts they consider relevant, the panel will reach a decision and make recommendations as appropriate within five working days of the Hearing. The panel will write to the parent/carer informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the panel will be final; its findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parent/carer, the Principal and, where relevant, the person complained of.

The college will keep a written record of all complaints and record at which stage resolution was achieved, and what action the school has taken. Records of all complaints, including any actions taken in response to formal complaints regardless of whether they are upheld, are maintained securely and centrally and are included in a termly report to Governors.

### **Unreasonable Complaints**

Rochester Independent College is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly, thoroughly, and in a timely manner. However, there may be rare occasions when individuals behave in a manner that is unacceptable despite the college's best efforts to resolve a concern or complaint. This may include:

- Repeatedly pursuing the same complaint with minor differences but no new evidence.
- Making excessive demands on staff time through frequent, lengthy, or aggressive communications.
- Raising complaints in a way that is abusive, offensive, defamatory, or threatening.
- Pursuing complaints with the intent to cause disruption, distress, or reputational damage.
- Pursuing unrealistic outcomes or insisting on pursuing a complaint through inappropriate channels.

A duplicate complaint is one that repeats the substance of a previous complaint made by the same individual, or by someone acting on their behalf, where the college has already fully investigated and responded to the issue. These complaints will not be re-opened unless significant new information is presented that materially affects the outcome of the original complaint.

Where a complaint is identified as vexatious, malicious, serial, duplicate, or unreasonable, the Principal (or their nominated representative) may:



- Inform the parent/carer that the complaint has been closed and will not be reopened unless new evidence is presented.
- Decline to consider duplicate complaints unless new and relevant information is provided.
- Place limits on the parent/carer's contact with the school (e.g. one named contact or specified communication channels).
- Refuse to consider any further complaints on the same matter.
- Seek advice or legal support where threats, defamatory statements or abusive behaviour are involved.
- Report behaviour that breaches safeguarding or the legal framework to the relevant authorities.

In exceptional cases, where the actions of a student or their parent/carer in relation to repeated vexatious, malicious, or unreasonable complaints cause significant disruption to the college community, undermine the wellbeing of staff or other pupils, or breach the school's code of conduct, the college reserves the right to take further action. This may include, in rare and serious instances, asking the student to leave the college or placing restrictions on their time in college, subject to appropriate procedures and oversight from the senior leadership and governing body.

The decision to designate a complaint as vexatious, malicious, serial, duplicate or unreasonable will be made carefully and proportionately. The parent/carer will be informed in writing of this decision and the reasons behind it. This will not prevent the individual from accessing the college's other formal procedures (such as those related to pupil welfare or safeguarding) if legitimate concerns arise in the future.

A parent/carer is entitled to contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate or their local safeguarding team regarding any complaint concerning student welfare.

The Principal can be contacted at Rochester Independent College, Star Hill, Rochester ME1 1XF. The contact number is 01634 828115. It may be the case that the timescales given at each stage are affected by timings of the college holidays.

The address of Aatif Hassan, the Proprietor and Chair of Governors, is Dukes House, 58 Buckingham Gate, London, England, SW1E 6AJ.

During the academic year 2024/25 the college received four complaints that moved beyond Stage 1 (informal resolution) of the complaints procedure. These were resolved at Stage 2 - Formal Resolution..

This policy is available on our website.



Created/Updated	Author	Approved by	Date
September 2019	ME	AB	September 2019
September 2020	KF	AB	September 2020
August 2021	KF	AB	September 2021
August 2022	CD	KF	August 2022
July 2023	CD	KF	July 2023
July 2024	KF	AB	July 2024
February 2025	KS	KF	February 2025
September 2025	KS	KF	September 2025