Complaints Policy – Complaints Procedure for Parents

Ellesmere College

The College will make reasonable adjustments where required to enable a parent with a disability or other relevant need to access and participate fairly in the complaint's procedure. This may include adjustments to communication methods, meeting arrangements, timescales or the format in which a complaint or supporting information is provided.

This policy is available on the College website.

1. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, the following terms are defined as:

Pupils	Refers to all children enrolled at Ellesmere College.
Staff	Refers to all staff, teaching and support employed by Ellesmere College.
Parent	A parent is defined by section 576 of the Education Act 1996, including a person with parental responsibility for the pupil and a person who has care of the pupil.
Clerk to the Council	The Clerk is the contact point for the (stage 3) complainant and the committee.
Complaints Panel Chair	The (stage 3) hearing will be chaired by a member of the panel (chosen by themselves).
Complaints Panel	Governors and Independent Panel member.
Governors Panel	Governors, who have had no prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
Independent Panel Member	For the purposes of this procedure, an independent panel member must have no employment, governance, financial, advisory or other relationship with the school which could reasonably call their independence into question. An Independent Panel Member will not have been involved in the matters complained about and will be independent of the management and governance of the College."
Custos	Chairman of the Governing Body.
School Council	Governing Body of Ellesmere College.
School days	School days means Monday to Friday during term time, excluding weekends and published school holidays. Where a deadline falls during a school holiday, the school will nevertheless take reasonable steps to progress the complaint where practicable and will not use school holidays to cause avoidable delay.

See Appendix 1 for Roles and Responsibilities.

2. Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints that a parent may raise with respect to Ellesmere College, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
Statutory assessments of	Concerns about statutory assessment of SEND should be raised with the local authority of where your home address is.

Special Educational Needs	
Education Matters	If the complaint relates to the classroom, the curriculum, or special educational needs, please discuss it with your child's tutor or Housemaster/Housemistress. They will then help you raise your concerns with the appropriate Head of Department or relevant senior leader. If the complaint concerns the administration of the IB or the application of IB policies, please refer it to the IB Coordinator and the Senior Deputy Head. Complaints relating to boarding provision, welfare, accommodation or pastoral care should initially be raised with the relevant Housemaster or Housemistress
Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation	Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.
Exclusion of children from school	See the school's exclusion policy. Ellesmere.College-policy-documents
Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
Fees and Extras	Please contact financesecretary@ellesmere.com

3. 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 complaint's procedure. Ellesmere College takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

4. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

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

- A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their son's or daughter's tutor or Housemaster/Housemistress, or the Head of Lower School, Middle School or Sixth Form. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the tutor or Housemaster/Housemistress or the Head of Lower School, Middle School or Sixth Form cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult others, such as a Head of Department, Deputy Head or the Head.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, Deputy Head or the Head will usually be

referred to the relevant person unless a Deputy Head or the Head deems it appropriate for him or her to deal with the matter personally.

- Informal concerns and complaints will be recorded in a proportionate manner. Where a concern has safeguarding implications, it will be recorded and managed in accordance with the College's safeguarding procedures. Formal complaints progressing to Stage 2 and Stage 3 will be recorded on the College's central complaints register.
- Should the matter not be resolved within 15 school days or in the event that the tutor or Housemaster/Housemistress or the Head of Lower School, Middle School or Sixth Form and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.
- The tutor or Housemaster/Housemistress or the Head of Lower School, Middle School or Sixth Form will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Such records will be kept by the respective staff and will not necessarily be recorded in a pupil's central file.
- If the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Custos, who can be contacted via the Clerk to the Council: Ellesmere College, Ellesmere, Shropshire. SY12 9AB
- Email: clerktothecouncil@ellesmere.com

5. **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should make their complaint to the Head. A Stage 2 complaint should normally be submitted in writing (the complaint form, Appendix 2, can be used as a template). Where a parent is unable to make the complaint in writing, the school will consider reasonable adjustments, including accepting the complaint in another accessible format.

i. The Head will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within 5 school days. During holidays, an acknowledgment will be provided as soon as practicable.

Within this response (if necessary) the Head will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see.

- If the parents seek a formal meeting with the Head, or raise issues through a formal letter, this would normally be regarded as a formal complaint, even if it has not been referred to as such in the letter.
- If a concern about a more minor matter is repeated and the parent is clearly not satisfied with the school's original response, it should also be regarded as a complaint.

ii. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take within *5* school days. The Head may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's Senior Management Group (SLT) The Head or member of the schools SLT can consider whether a face-to-face meeting is appropriate in order to help resolve the complaint.
- A person who has had direct involvement in the matters complained of, or who may otherwise have a conflict of interest, will not investigate the complaint.

iii. It may be necessary for the Head or SLT to carry out further investigations.
- If necessary, interview staff involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing

them to be accompanied if they wish, in line with employment regulations.

iv. The Head or SLT will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- If investigations are carried out by a member of the SLT, their findings will be reported back to the Head.

v. Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing within 15 school days of the complaint being acknowledged. The Head will also give reasons for his decision. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions that will be taken to resolve the complaint.

vi. If the Head is unable to meet this deadline, he will provide the complainant with an update and revised response.

vii. If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure. Within 5 school days of stating they remain dissatisfied, the Head will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

viii. If the complaint is about the Head or member of the governing body (including the Custos), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.
- Complaints about the Head or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk of the Council (clerktothecouncil@ellesmere.com or 01691 622321 or via letter Ellesmere College, Ellesmere, Shropshire SY12 9AB)
- If the complaint is jointly about the Custos, or the entire governing body or the majority of the governing body, Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

6 Stage 3 Panel Hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), their complaint should be renewed in writing to the Custos of the Council. A letter to the Custos should give full details of the complaint and enclose all relevant documents and full contact details, preferably on the complaint form (Appendix 2).

Correspondence with the Custos should be sent to the Clerk to the Council: Ellesmere College, Ellesmere, Shropshire. SY12 9AB Email: clerktothecouncil@ellesmere.com

i. The Clerk to the Council will record when the complaint (stage 3) is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within *5* school days. During holidays an acknowledgement will be provided as soon as is practicable.

ii. Where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the Stage 2 response, the complainant will be entitled to request a Stage 3 panel hearing. The Clerk will arrange for a panel to be appointed in accordance with this procedure. The panel can decide the merits. The Panel will consider whether the complaints procedure has been followed appropriately, review the evidence presented by all parties and determine whether the complaint should be upheld in whole or in part.

The Panel may dismiss a complaint where it is determined that the complaint has already been fully considered under this procedure and no new evidence has been presented.

iii. The complaint will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration who will be selected by the custos. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the school, the other two will be governors of the College. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the School Council. The Clerk to the Council, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within *20* school days of the Clerk to the Council acknowledging the stage 3 complaint.

- The Panel will not normally sit during half-terms or longer school holidays.
- The Clerk will send the parents written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing together with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it.

iv. Prior to the hearing the panel may review the material provided from stage 2 and how the process was handled.

- Copies of additional documents (that relate to the original complaint) that the parent may wish the panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk at least 5 school days prior to the hearing.
- The Panel will not normally consider matters which constitute a new complaint. However, new evidence relating to the existing complaint may be considered where the Panel considers that it is relevant and that doing so is fair.
- In establishing the facts, the panel may wish to speak with members of staff. Although these are not legal proceedings, a school employee may be entitled to bring union or legal representation, in line with employment regulations.

v. If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than *5* school days prior to the hearing.

vi. The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate at a Stage 3 hearing. The Panel Chair may permit legal representation in exceptional circumstances where this is necessary to ensure fairness, accessibility or the proper consideration of the complaint. The companion may provide reasonable support to the complainant and, with the permission of the Panel Chair, may make brief representations or ask questions on the complainant's behalf. The Panel may regulate participation to ensure that the hearing remains fair and proportionate. The Complaints Panel Hearing is not a legal hearing and it is therefore not generally appropriate for either the Complainant or the College to be legally represented.

- The meeting will be held in private. Audio or video recording will not normally be permitted without prior agreement. The College will consider requests to record as a reasonable adjustment where appropriate.
- Where legal proceedings are commenced which directly concern the subject matter of the complaint, the College may seek legal advice about whether any aspect of the complaints procedure should be adjusted. Any such decision will be proportionate and will not ordinarily prevent the complainant from completing

the complaints procedure.

- If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, this does not remove the school's obligation to hold the hearing in conformity with its complaints policy.

vii. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. The panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented.

- Evidence. The Panel chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity of asking questions and making comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and/or may take statements into account.
- Conduct. All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the panel may:
  - Adjourn;
  - Issue conduct directions;
  - Continue without the person if reasonable;
  - Accept written submissions;
  - Reconvene;
  - In genuinely extreme cases, determine the complaint based on the evidence available.
- Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his/her comment will be minuted.

viii. 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 may make recommendations, which it shall complete within *20* school days of the hearing.

ix. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final under the College's complaints procedure. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be:

- sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parent, the Custos and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
- available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Head.

The Panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant, the Head, those complained about (where relevant) and Chair of Governors. The findings and recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietors and the Head.

7. Time scales for raising a complaint

Complaints should normally be raised within three months of the incident, or where a series of associated incidents has occurred, within three months of the last incident. The College will consider complaints submitted outside this period where there are reasonable or exceptional circumstances for the delay.

8. Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Ellesmere College wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology

9. Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing. The College is committed to dealing with complaints fairly, openly and impartially. Where a complainant's behaviour becomes unreasonable, abusive, repetitive or vexatious, the College reserves the right to implement proportionate measures to manage communication while continuing to consider any substantive complaint fairly and in accordance with this procedure.

10. Records

A central complaints register will contain a written record will be kept of all complaints that reach Stage 2 (Formal Resolution) of this procedure and will cover:

- The complaint;
- Its progress;
- Whether it was resolved at Stage 2;
- Whether it proceeded to Stage 3;
- The final outcome;
- Action taken by the College regardless of whether upheld.

The College will process personal data relating to complaints fairly and lawfully and in accordance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018

Information relating to complaints will be handled confidentially and in accordance with applicable data protection law. Information may be disclosed where required or permitted by law, including where disclosure is required for inspection or regulatory purposes.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where disclosure is required in the course of the school's inspection, where another legal obligation applies, or where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.

Any personal data collected as a result of raising a complaint with the school will be kept in accordance with the College's data protection policy and Privacy Notices (available on the College's website).

- Where a complaint is also a complaint made by a data subject concerning the processing of their personal data, the College will ensure that the complaint is handled in accordance with the applicable requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR, including any applicable

requirements concerning acknowledgment, investigation and communication of the outcome. Where necessary, the College will adapt the timescales or procedure to ensure compliance with those requirements.

11. Following the Stage 3 Panel Conclusion.

The issue of the Stage 3 Panel's findings and recommendations marks the conclusion of the College's complaints procedure.

Where a complainant considers that the College has failed to comply with the Independent School Standards or has otherwise acted contrary to education law, they may raise the matter with the Department for Education as regulator. ISI may receive information relevant to its inspection functions. Complaints concerning ISI itself are dealt with under ISI's own complaints procedure.

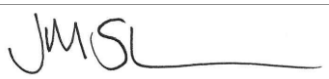
ISI is a government approved inspectorate responsible for the Inspection of Association Independent Schools. The ISI, Independent Schools Inspectorate, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA Tel. 0207 600 0100 www.isi.net

12. Contact details.

Head: Mr Jonathan Shaw	hmsecretary@ellesmere.com 01691 622321
Clerk to the Council: Mrs Rhona Avery	clerktothecouncil@ellesmere.com 01691 626509

13. Monitoring and Review:

- This policy will be reviewed annually and updated sooner where changes in legislation, regulations, statutory guidance or operational requirements make this necessary.
- The review will be carried out by the Deputy Head Pastoral and recommendation sent to the Head for authorisation.

Authorised by	The Governors/The Head	
Date	September 2026	

Reviewed by	DHP	
Date	September 2026	

Effective date of the policy September 2026

Appendix 1: Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant - Parent
The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator - Head or member of the SLT (Stage 2)
The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
    - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
    - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
    - consideration of records and other relevant information
    - analysing information

The investigator should:

- act impartially, objectively and without actual or apparent conflict of interest and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond (see Appendix 3 for an overview)
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Head that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

  The Head will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Clerk to the Council (Stage 3)
The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the Complaints Panel and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 2 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale.
- keep all records of the procedure.
- circulate minutes of meetings.
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Complaints Panel Chair (Stage 3)
The committee's chair, who is nominated by the panel in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease.
- the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
- written material, referenced in the meeting, is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

  If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently

- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk.

Committee Members
Committee members should be aware that:

- the members must be independent and impartial of the complaint, and should be seen to be so

  No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.
- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

  We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.
- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

  Parents often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- the welfare and best interests of the pupil will be an important consideration in handling complaints, alongside the College's legal and regulatory duties.

Appendix 2. Complaint Form

Please complete and return to The Head or Clerk to the Governors who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:	Pupil's name:
Your relationship to the pupil:	
Address:	Day time telephone number Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it:	
What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?	
Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details:	
Signature:	Date:
Official use:	
Date of acknowledgement sent:	By who:
Complaint referred to:	Date:

Appendix 3: Action timescales for complaint Stages 2 & 3:

Timescale (School days)	**Date**	**Action**	**Responsibility of whom**	**Completed by**	**Date**	**Notes**
Stage 2		Official notification of a Stage 2 compliant	HM			
Within 5 days from receipt		Head will record and acknowledge receipt of Stage 2 complaint by letter or email.	HM			
Within 5 days from acknowledgement		Head will consider appropriate course of action and may delegate the investigation to a member of SLT	HM			
		Consider whether face to face meeting is appropriate.	HM/SLT			
		Further investigations carried out e.g. interview staff involved.	HM/SLT			
Within 15 days of complaint being acknowledged		Inform parent of decision made giving reasons for decision. Where appropriate include details of actions that will be taken.	HM			
Within 15 days of complaint being acknowledged		If unable to meet deadline an update and revised response date given.	HM			
Within 5 days of parents stating they remain dissatisfied		If parents wish to proceed to stage 3. The Head will advise how to escalate the complaint.	HM			

Timescale (School days)	**Date**	**Action**	**Responsibility of whom**	**Completed by**	**Date**	**Notes**
<u>Stage 3</u>		Renewed notification of compliant to Custos.	Custos			
Within 5 days from receipt		Clerk to the Governors will record and acknowledge receipt of Stage 3 complaint by letter or email.	Clerk			
Within 5 days from acknowledgement		Custos will determine whether further investigation is warranted.	Custos			
Within 15 days from acknowledgement		If the matter is to be investigated further a complaints panel will be convened. The Clerk to the Governors on behalf of the Panel will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing.	Clerk			
Within 20 days from acknowledgement		The Clerk to the Council will send the parents written notification of the date, time and place of the hearing with brief details of the Panel members who will hear it.	Clerk			
Within 5 days prior to the hearing		Additional documents that the parents wish to be considered sent to the Clerk.	Parents			
Within 5 days prior to the hearing		Further particulars or related matter supplied in advance of the hearing to all parties.	Parents/Clerk			
Within 20 school days of complaint being acknowledged		Complaints Panel Hearing.	Panel			
Within 20 days after the hearing		Panel reach a decision through review of documents and interviews and may make recommendations.	Panel/Clerk			