



## Complaints Policy

**This policy applies to:**

Whole College parental body including EYFS

**Person responsible for the policy:**

Senior Deputy Head

**Review dates:**

Last review Sept 2024

Next review Sept 2025

Ardingly College ('the College') welcomes suggestions and comments from parents and takes seriously complaints and concerns that may arise if you are unhappy about a matter. This policy will show you how to use our complaints system.

Parents of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage may use the procedure identified below. They may also raise concerns through an additional route identified in the final section of this document.

### **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 or student believes that the school has done something wrong, or failed to do something that it should have done or acted fairly.

## **Parental Complaints Procedure**

The College aims to deal with complaints as sympathetically and expeditiously as possible and to resolve them, either to the complainant's satisfaction, or with an otherwise appropriate outcome which balances the rights and duties of students. The three stages of resolution (informal, formal and panel hearing) are explained in this policy.

There is a separate complaints procedure for students, and it may be that parents wish to involve the parental complaints procedure if they are dissatisfied with the College's handling of a complaint by a student.

Pupils whose parents make complaints in good faith will not be penalised in any way.

The law requires the College to follow a clear procedure when a complaint is made. Because the investigation and response to a complaint can be so time-consuming, we ask parents who make a complaint to be clear, at the start of any letter or conversation, that they are making a formal complaint rather than an observation about some aspect of administration or welfare. Although all formal complaints will be made in writing, this does not mean that the formal stage is automatically triggered whenever a concern is expressed in writing – all complaints begin at stage 1 as outlined below. In its record keeping, the College distinguishes between causes for concern and formal complaints.

Parents may wish to be accompanied by a friend or family member to a complaints meeting, but not by a legal representative.

Staff and parents may take notes for their own purposes, but it is not expected that meetings are recorded. Neither party is allowed to make a digital recording without the knowledge and consent of the other. In exceptional circumstances, and with prior agreement of both parents and staff, meeting notes may be taken by a member of staff, and subsequently circulated to attendees.

## **Confidentiality**

Parents can be assured that all complaints and concerns will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or inspecting body [under section 109 of the 2008 Act] requests

access, where disclosure is required in the course of the College's inspection, or where other legal obligation prevails.

## How to Complain

### Education Matters

If the complaint relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please discuss it with your child's class teacher (Pre Prep), Form Tutor (Year 3 – 8) or Housemaster/Housemistress (Year 9 – 13). They will then help you to put your concerns to the appropriate Head of Department or the relevant Deputy Head Academic (Prep or Senior School).

If the complaint relates to the administration of IB, or the application of IB policies please refer it to the IB Coordinator and Deputy Head Academic in the first instance.

### Pastoral Care

If the concern relates to a matter outside the classroom or in the House, please speak or write to the Assistant Head Pastoral (Prep school), Head of Lower School Pastoral (Year 7 & 8) or Housemaster/Housemistress (Years 9 - 13) in the first instance. They will then put you in touch with the Deputy Head (Pastoral and Co-curricular) in the Senior School, or relevant Head if you wish.

### Disciplinary Matters

A concern about disciplinary sanctions should be first raised with the Housemaster or Housemistress (Head of Section in the Prep School), who will put you in touch with the member of staff who imposed the sanction. If not resolved, then you should address your concern to the Senior Deputy Head in the Senior School, or relevant Head if you wish.

### Financial Matters

A concern or complaint about the matter relating to fees or extras should be stated in writing to the Finance Director. If not resolved promptly, please send a copy of the letter of complaint to the Head of College.

## Stages of Resolution

*Please note that all timelines outlined in this policy may require reasonable levels of flexibility as a consequence of unforeseen disruption or staff absence.*

### Stage 1: Informal resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact the class teacher (Pre Prep), Form Tutor (Year 3 – 8) or Housemaster/Housemistress (Year 9 – 13). In many cases, the matter will be resolved straight-away by this means to the parents' satisfaction. Should the matter not be resolved within five normal school-working days, or in the event that the member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

### Stage 2: Formal resolution

The Head (of College or Senior/Prep) may delegate at this stage to another senior member of staff - normally the relevant Deputy Head. All references to Head under Stage 2 shall, therefore, automatically be taken to refer to the respective Head of Senior or Prep School and including those named above.

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head of Senior/Prep School. The respective Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take and how the College might improve its processes.

In most cases, the respective Head (or nominee) will meet or speak with parents concerned, normally within five normal school-working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. Every attempt will be made to reach a resolution at this stage.

It may be necessary for the respective Head (or nominee) to carry out further investigations.

Once the Head (or nominee) is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and the parents will be informed of the decision in writing, normally within five normal school-working days. The respective Head (or nominee) will also give reasons for their decision and the Chair of Governors may be called to mediate if necessary.

Parents are asked to reply to the stage 2 response from the school within five normal school-working days, where there can be flexibility for any extenuating circumstances which might have impeded the parent from taken action. This is to avoid the process being indefinitely open-ended. If not satisfied with the school's response then they can take their complaint to the next stage.

### **Stage 3 – Appeal Panel Hearing**

If the parents remain dissatisfied, they should make an appeal in writing to the Chair of Governors (also known as the Council) within fourteen days of receipt of the written outcome c/o The Clerk to the Governors at the College's address.

When the Chair is satisfied that they have all the necessary information, they will convene a panel of three people to hear the complaint, at least one of which will be a Governor of the College and one will be a person of standing, not involved in the College. This person will be independent from the management and running of the College and all members of the panel must have had no previous involvement with the matter being complained about.

The Chair of the Council, on behalf of the panel, will acknowledge the request, and schedule a meeting to take place as soon as practicable, and normally within fifteen normal school-working days of the receipt of the appeal.

Any documents which are to be considered by the appeal panel will be disclosed to both parties, not later than five normal school-working days before the hearing.

Parents may be accompanied to the hearing, if they so wish, by the student concerned, and by one other person of their choice. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.

The Head of College may not be present at the hearing, but may be invited to meet the panel afterwards, before they reach their decision.

At the hearing the appeal panel may consider evidence from any person who was involved in the decision under discussion, and any relevant documents pertaining to this decision.

The panel will try to resolve the parents' appeal immediately without need for further investigation. If further investigation is required, the panel will decide how it should be carried out.

After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the panel will consider its decision and any recommendation it may wish to take. The Clerk to the appeal panel will remain in attendance to record the panel's decision.

The Chair of Governors will write to the complainant informing them of the panel's decision and the reasons for it within five normal school-working days of the hearing. The decision of the panel will be final.

The panel's finding and recommendations, if any, will also be sent in writing to the Head of College, and where relevant any person about whom the complaint was made. The matter will be reported to the Governors at their next full Council meeting. A copy of those findings and recommendations is available for inspection on the school premises via the Clerk to the Governors, by the Governors and the Head.

If Social Services need to be contacted their telephone number is: 01243 771000. Concerns may also be addressed to ISI (Tel No: 0207 600 0100).

## Monitoring Complaints

A formal complaint registered on the College's Complaints Register is one that has been registered by a parent, pupil or third party and is encompassed by the College's Complaints Procedure for pupils or parents. By its nature a formal complaint is more serious and severe than an informal complaint or cause for concern. A complaint will normally, but not exclusively, be focused upon a person or persons associated with the College, their conduct or behaviour or will generally identify a perceived failure, error or breach of contract (in the broadest sense of the term) between the College and the complainant.

A written record will be kept of formal complaints, and whether they were resolved following a formal procedure (stage 2) or proceeded to a panel hearing (stage 3), as well as the action taken, regardless of whether they are upheld. The record of complaints must be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request. Records of complaints will be kept for a **minimum of seven** years, for those that do not have a safeguarding element. Where there is a safeguarding perspective, records concerning allegations of abuse must be preserved for the term of the Independent inquiry into the Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.

The number of formal complaints registered during the preceding academic year is available on request.

## Persistent correspondence

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of this policy.

If after multiple complaints it is deemed necessary, the Head of College or relevant Head of School may seek a meeting with parents to discuss the school-parent relationship.

## **Complaints in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

Parents of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage may use the procedure identified above but they may also complain to Ofsted directly.

### **Complaints Procedure in Early Years**

Complaints or concerns can be raised with the Nursery Lead or Head by contacting the school office (01444 893300 02 893000). The record of complaints will be made available to Ofsted.

Formal complaints may be directed to the Chair of Governors, Mrs Jenny Martin, c/o Ardingly College, Haywards Heath, West Sussex. RH17 6QS

Parents may contact Ofsted on Tel. No: 0300 123 1231 or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Parents may also complain to ISI (tel. No. 0207 600 0100 or email [info@isi.net](mailto:info@isi.net) ).

The College will investigate written complaints relating to their fulfillment of the EYFS requirements and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint.