



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/guardian has a complaint they should contact the relevant Administrator or Personal Tutor in the first instance. If they cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary to check with the Principal.

The Administrator/Personal Tutor 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 the complaints file in the office in Star Hill.

Should the matter not be resolved within five working days or in the event that the Administrator/Personal Tutor and the parent/guardian fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then they will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2 Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parent/guardian 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/guardian concerned, as soon as possible to discuss the matter, but will always be within seven working days from receiving the formal complaint in writing. If possible a resolution will be reached at this stage.

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 office in Star Hill. 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/guardian and give the reasons for the decision within 28 working days.

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

Stage 3 Panel Hearing

If the parent/guardian 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. 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/guardian that they wish to proceed with a stage 3 hearing.

If the panel deems it necessary, further particulars of the complaint or any related matter should be supplied in advance of the Hearing. All parties will be copied with all relevant material, no later than two working days before the hearing.

Although legal representation is not normally appropriate at a panel hearing, the parent/guardian 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/guardian'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/guardian 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/guardian, the Principal and, where relevant, the person complained of.

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints from Stage 2, and record at which stage resolution was achieved, and what action the school has taken. The written record of complaints specifically identifies those complaints relating to boarding provision and the actions taken by the school as a result of these complaints. Records of all complaints, including records of any actions taken in response to formal complaints regardless of whether they are upheld, are kept securely but are available for inspection in the office in Star Hill by the proprietors and the Principal, and are included in a termly report to Governors. The parent/guardian can be assured that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential in the administrators' office except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection requests access to them.

A parent/guardian is entitled to contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate or their local child protection 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 14-16 Waterloo Place, London SW1Y 4AR.

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