

Complaints Policy

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

Ampleforth College

Person responsible for Policy	Head Ampleforth College
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Policy: At a glance

- This policy sets out the process by which a complaint can be made
- This includes the three stages of complaint: 1 – informal, 2 – formal 3- panel hearing.
- This policy should be read and understood by all parents, students and staff.

1. **Introduction, guiding principles, and stages of complaint**

Ampleforth College, hereafter known as the 'College', are committed to meeting the needs of our students. However, the College recognises that not everything goes well for everybody all of the time. There are times when misunderstandings, confusion or genuine concerns give rise to complaints. The intention of this policy is to provide a clear and transparent process that will enable such complaints to be dealt with promptly, fairly and proportionately.

For the purposes of this policy, a 'parent' shall include a guardian, carer or any other person with parental responsibility for a child at the College. This policy applies to complaints from parents of current students and to parents of former students if the complaint was initially raised whilst the student was on the school roll.

This policy has been approved by the Head and the Governors of St Laurence Trust ('the Governors') and is available on the Parent Portal or on request from the Head's Department. It can be made available in large print or another more accessible format, if required. If assistance is needed with making a complaint, for example because of a disability, a parent should contact the Head's EA, who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements.

Separate procedures apply if the Head expels or asks a student to leave and a parent seeks a Review by the Governors of that decision (a copy of these procedures is available on request).

All school staff are made aware of this policy and are expected to familiarise themselves with the procedures for dealing with complaints to ensure they can be of most assistance when an issue is brought to their attention.

The College's guiding principles in complaint resolution are:

- to give careful and prompt consideration to all complaints;
- to seek to achieve a just and fair outcome, taking due account of all relevant evidence;
- to attempt to resolve complaints through dialogue and mutual understanding, and at as early a stage as possible.

This policy outlines three stages of complaint:

- a. Stage 1: Informal Resolution
- b. Stage 2: Formal Resolution
- c. Stage 3: Panel Hearing

Where timescales are given in ‘working days’, this is defined as Monday - Friday during term time (the dates of which are available on our website). Complaints received during holiday periods, including exeat days, will be dealt with as soon as is practicable but are likely to take longer to resolve due to the unavailability of relevant staff. Under such circumstances the complainant will be notified of any extension to the timescales and the reason(s) why an extension is necessary when the complaint is acknowledged.

Parents can request from the Head’s EA the number of formal complaints the College received during the academic year 2023/24.

2. Stage 1: Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns can be resolved quickly and informally. A parent with cause for concern or complaint should feel free to talk directly to a member of staff, to telephone, or write with the details of the issue that concerns them. In the first instance, it is usually best to address an academic or pastoral concern to your child’s tutor, Housemistress/Housemaster, or to the Bursar if the issue is a financial matter, as they are often best placed to resolve the matter quickly. The parent may also refer a matter to the Head or one of the Deputy Heads, either directly or after an initial discussion with the Housemistress/Housemaster.

The College will acknowledge a written notification of a concern by e-mail or by letter within **two** working days of receipt. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the appropriate member of staff will arrange to speak with the complainant or invite them to a meeting within **five** working days of acknowledgement. This meeting may prompt further investigation or wider consultation but, in any event, this stage of the complaints process should be completed within **10** working days of the complaint being acknowledged.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days of acknowledgement or in the event that the parent and member of staff fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the parent will be advised to proceed with the complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.

3. Stage 2: Formal Resolution

If a complaint has not been resolved on an informal basis, then the parent should make a formal complaint to the Head. This must be done in writing, stating explicitly that he/she wishes to invoke the formal complaints procedure.

Formal complaints will be acknowledged in writing by the Head within **two** days of being received. In most cases, the Head will meet or speak to the parent concerned to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. It may be necessary, however, for the Head to conduct an investigation. 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 the parent will be informed of this decision in writing, no later than **15** working days after the formal complaint was acknowledged. The Head will give reasons for the decision reached.

Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept. The complainant will be informed if due to exceptional circumstances any additional time is necessary to complete the investigation.

If the parent is still not satisfied with the decision, he/she should proceed to Stage 3 of the complaints procedure.

Alternative procedure for handling formal complaints about the Head

A parent wishing to make a complaint about the Head may do so by writing to the Chair of the Governors at the College address. The Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing within **two** working days, indicating what action is being taken and the likely timescale. The procedures and timescales that apply to any other formal complaint (see above) will be followed.

If the parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to a Complaints Panel under Stage 3 of this procedure.

4. Stage 3: Panel Hearing

If the parent wishes to proceed to Stage 3 (following a failure to reach a resolution earlier in the complaints process) they should write to the Clerk to the Governors, who is responsible for making the arrangements for a Panel Hearing, at the College address. In the written request for a Panel Hearing, the parent should state the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired. He/she should also send a list of all the documents that they believe to be in the College's possession that they consider relevant in the matter and that they wish the Panel to see; these documents should be sent to the Clerk to the Governors at least **seven** days before the date of the hearing. Copies of all such documents shall be supplied to all parties by the Clerk to the Governors not later than **three** working days before the hearing.

The Clerk to the Governors will acknowledge receipt of the complaint within **five** working days and will endeavour to schedule a meeting of the Panel within **15** working days thereafter, keeping the complainant informed if there are unavoidable reasons for a delay. The Panel appointed by the Chair of Governors will consist of at least three people not directly involved in matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the College. The parent may ask the Clerk of Governors to inform them who has been appointed to sit on the Panel ahead of the hearing. Fair consideration will be given to any reasonable objection to a particular panel member.

The complainant may be accompanied by a friend or relative, but legal representation is not usually appropriate. If a parent wishes to be accompanied by someone who is legally qualified, the Clerk must be informed seven working days in advance of the hearing. The legally qualified person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or address the hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Panel.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent'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 the matters discussed at the hearing, the Panel will reach a decision. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations shall be confirmed in writing to the parent and, where relevant, to the person complained about within five working days of the hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations will be available for inspection on the College premises by the Head and the Chair of Governors.

5. Record keeping and confidentiality

A written record will be kept by the Head of all formal complaints, including any action(s) taken by the College as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether it is upheld), and of whether they are resolved at Stage 2 or progressed to a panel hearing.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously. Correspondence, statements and records will be kept confidential except as required by the College by paragraph 33 (k) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent Colleges Standards) Regulations 2014; namely, where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them, or where any other legal obligations prevail. Records of individual complaints will be retained at least until the College's next inspection and, in accordance with data protection principles, thereafter only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

Senior leaders and Governors will maintain oversight of these records in order to determine the appropriate implementation of this policy and to respond to any patterns of complaints which may be apparent.

6. Contacting ISI

Whilst the College hopes that parents will be able to express any dissatisfaction openly and with confidence that the College will act reasonably and promptly in order to resolve matters, they can contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate, or the Department for Education whose contact details are as follows:

Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
9-12 Long Lane
London
9HA
www.isi.net
concerns@isi.net
0207 600 100

Department for Education
<https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school/private-schools>

7. Monitoring and review of complaints policy and procedures

The Board of Governors will monitor the number and type of complaints received and the operation of the procedures set out in this policy. They will also review the policy at least annually to ensure it meets statutory requirements and continues to reflect best practice.