

Parent Complaint Procedure - including EYFS and Boarding

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Policy Approved by:	Compliance & Risk Committee
Policy Owner:	Head, Trent College Head, The Elms
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Governor Committee(s):	Compliance & Risk Committee

This Policy details the procedures in place to deal with a complaint against the school (defined as either The Elms, including EYFS, and/or Trent College) by the parent(s) or person with parental responsibility (defined as "parent") of an existing pupil, or by the parent(s) of a former pupil providing that the complaint is presented within 90 calendar days of the events complained about. This Policy is available on the school's website.

The time limits and scope restrictions outlined above do not apply to any expressions of concern or complaints relating to safeguarding, child protection, or allegations of serious historical misconduct against staff. All such matters will be treated with the utmost seriousness and handled immediately in accordance with the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and relevant statutory guidance, including referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) where appropriate.

We are committed to promoting and supporting positive pupil mental health and wellbeing through our policies and practice. Our first consideration, as professional, adult practitioners, will be how our actions support and promote the wellbeing of every child.

Introduction

The School strives to create a culture of openness between parents and staff. We place great emphasis on communicating with parents through a variety of formal and informal opportunities, which include, but are not limited to pupil diaries, daily drop-off/collection, website, texting, email from teachers, tutors and Heads of Year, parent 'drop-in' and information sessions, parents' evenings, etc.

Parents may have a concern or complaint about any aspect of the school. We encourage parents to share their concerns with us at the earliest opportunity so we can work together to resolve them.

Please note that, for the purposes of this Policy, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time (as published on the school's website), excluding bank holidays. This means that during school holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the school will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. Timescales may be extended during school holidays where staff are unavailable.

Data Protection Complaints

Complaints relating to the processing of personal data may be dealt with under this procedure. Where a complaint falls within the scope of section 164A of the Data Protection Act 2018, the

School will ensure that the complaint is acknowledged, investigated and responded to in accordance with the requirements of that legislation in addition to this Policy.

Stage 1 – Informal Complaint and Resolution

- If a parent, parents or a person with parental responsibility have a complaint they should contact their son/daughter's Class Teacher (The Elms) or Tutor or Head of Year (Trent) or Boarding Housemaster/mistress. In most cases, the matter will be resolved by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the complaint cannot be immediately resolved by the member of staff receiving the complaint, then the member of staff receiving the initial complaint should acknowledge the complaint in writing (which could be an email) within 24 hours and identify the more senior member of staff who will now be dealing with the complaint and inform the parent.
- A record of the complaint and the date on which it was received will be made by the relevant senior member of staff. At this informal stage, the senior member of staff assigned to deal with the parental complaint should make contact with the complainant within one working week (by email, letter or phone call) and address the complaint or outline a clear time frame for further investigation. The senior member of staff dealing with the complaint should complete the complaints log, setting out what action (if any) has been taken and the date the complaint is closed. The senior member of staff should make it clear to the parent that if they are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint, they can proceed to the next step of the Parent Complaint Procedure and write to the Head (letter or email) explaining they wish to make a formal complaint at Stage 2 of this procedure (see below). A senior member of staff should be in a position of responsibility in the area being complained about. The following are examples:
- Nursery and Pre-school concerns / complaints may be referred onto the Nursery Leader or Pre-school Leader.
- EYFS concerns / complaints may be referred onto the Deputy Head at The Elms.
- Pastoral complaints may be referred onto the Deputy Head at The Elms or the Deputy Head, Pastoral for Trent.
- Academic complaints may be referred onto the Deputy Head at The Elms or the Deputy Head, Academic for Trent.
- Co-curricular complaints may be referred onto the Deputy Head at The Elms or the Deputy Head, Academic for Trent.
- Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days (deemed as two school weeks during term time) or in the event that the school and the parents fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents may wish to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure.
- The School keeps a log of informal complaints and monitors this for emerging patterns.

Stage 2 – Formal Complaint and Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in **writing (letter or email)** to the Head of The Elms or Trent College. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint and consulting with staff, the appropriate course of action to take.
- The Head, or a delegated senior member of staff, will meet the parents concerned, within 10 working days of receiving the complaint (unless exceptional circumstances such as the complainant being on holiday make this time frame impossible), to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the Head (or representative) to carry out further investigation. The findings and recommendations from this further investigation will be collected within 7 working days then provided to the complainant. It will also, where relevant, be provided to the person complained about. Where possible, the School will seek to appoint a senior

member of staff who has had no direct involvement in the case to act as Investigating Officer.

- Where the complaint applies specifically to EYFS provision, a full written response pertaining to the fulfilment of EYFS requirements will be investigated and the complainant will require a response within 28 days with the outcome of any investigation.
- The Head, or representative, will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint, which will also be made available for the complainant.
- The School retains a written record of formal complaints as part of its complaints procedure, whether they are resolved at the first formal stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a panel hearing (Stage 3) and of any action taken by the School as a result of a formal complaint (whether or not the complaint is upheld).
- Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parent(s) will be informed of this decision in writing, and reasons for the decision given.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they may proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure. Where the complaint is directed specifically at the delegated representative, the procedure will, by necessity, involve the Head of The Elms or Trent College as appropriate.
- Where the complaint is directed specifically at the Head of The Elms, the procedure will, by necessity, involve the Head of Trent College.
- Where the complaint is directed specifically at the Head of Trent College, it should be made to the Chair of Governors.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution via Stage 2), they should notify the School of their intention to do so within three calendar weeks of the date of receiving written notice of the Stage 2 outcome. They will then be referred to the Clerk to the Governors at Trent College, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom will be a person independent of the management and running of the school (and will generally follow the profile of *"people who have held a position of responsibility and are used to analysing evidence and putting forward balanced argument ... Examples of persons likely to be suitable are serving or retired business people, civil servants, heads or senior members of staff at other schools, people with a legal background and retired members of the Police Force..."* from DfE guidance on an independent panel member).
- The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Chair of Governors, will appoint each of the Panel members and will appoint one Panel member to act as Chair of the Panel. The Clerk, on behalf of the Panel, will acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as is reasonably practicable and normally within 20 working days (unless exceptional circumstances such as the complainant being on holiday make this time frame impossible).
- 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 two days before the hearing.
- The parent(s) may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. The accompanying person should be there in a supportive capacity and can remind or make suggestions to the parent(s) in response to questions from the Panel, however they do not have the right to ask or answer questions on behalf of the parent(s). Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parent's complaint 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 the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision and communicate its findings, recommendations and reasons for its decision to the complainant, the Governors and, where appropriate, the person complained about within 10 working days of the hearing.
- The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel will write to all participants (including the complainant, the Board of Governors and, where appropriate, the person about whom the complaint has been made) informing them of the findings, the recommendations and the reasons for these.

Where the Panel makes recommendations to the School arising from its consideration of a complaint, the School will provide a written response to the Chair of the Panel within 28 calendar days of receiving those recommendations. The response will set out any actions taken or proposed in response to the recommendations and, where a recommendation is not adopted in full, the reasons for that decision. This process does not constitute a further stage of the complaints procedure or a right of appeal.

Record-keeping

Details of complaints received are held centrally and regularly monitored by the Leadership Team. Such written records will include the findings and recommendations from all investigations into complaints. This monitoring is to ensure that any trend is quickly identified and managed in the best interests of our pupils.

Records of all complaints will be made available for Governor scrutiny when requested, and Governors make regular checks of these. Complaint statistics and trends are reported to the Governing Body on a termly basis. The written record of complaints held by the School will indicate whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or moved to either Stage 2 (formal complaint) or then onto Stage 3 (a panel hearing).

These will be available for inspection on the school premises by the Chair of the Board of Governors and the Head of Trent College or the Head of The Elms.

A written record of all complaints made during a specified period, and the action taken as a result of each complaint, will be made available during inspection and when requested by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and OFSTED (in the case of EYFS provision).

All complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. When dealing with complaints, the School processes data in accordance with the School's Privacy Notice. Records of complaints and Panel hearings will be kept as required by regulation and in accordance with the School's Privacy Notice, Data Protection Policy and Retention of Records Policy. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except 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.

Parents and parents of prospective pupils can request details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year by contacting the Head's Executive Assistant.

For the academic year 2025-26, the number of Formal Complaints was:

The Elms	1
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Trent College	4
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The Independent Schools Inspectorate inspects the EYFS, educational and boarding provision and compliance in Independent Schools. As a registered setting catering for children under the age of two years old, the School is also registered with OFSTED for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Parents of EYFS children should follow the three stages of this Policy. If parents remain dissatisfied and their complaint is about the school's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements, then parents may take their complaint to the ISI or OFSTED. Parents will be notified by ISI or

OFSTED of the outcome of the investigation into their complaint within 28 days of the complaint being received.

Parents may complain directly to the ISI or OFSTED if they believe that the School is not meeting the EYFS requirements.

Contact details:

ISI: Independent Schools Inspectorate
CAP House
9 – 12 Long Lane
London
EC1A 9HA
General enquiries: Tel: 020 7600 0100 e-mail: info@isi.net
Concerns about a school: Tel: 020 7600 0100 e-mail: concerns@isi.net

OFSTED: OFSTED
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester M1 2WD
Tel: 0300 123 1231 e-mail: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk