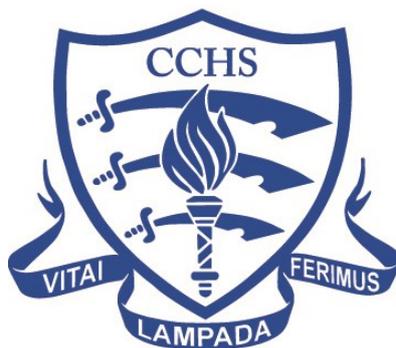


Chelmsford County High School for Girls



Complaints Policy

Approved by the Governing Body: November 2020

Chelmsford County High School for Girls

Complaints Policy

Introduction

As a school, we encourage feedback from students and parents. Compliments are particularly welcome and very encouraging to teachers and staff. However, concerns and complaints are always given due consideration and every effort is made to respond according to the School's Policy.

Concerns

It is natural that parents may, occasionally, be concerned about an aspect of their daughter's education or welfare at school. This could include issues concerning the school's approach to aspects of the curriculum, homework, behavioural problems or any other issue.

The School welcomes an open dialogue with parents about such matters. Teachers and staff will explain practices, policies, and how they affect the students. The vast majority of concerns will be handled by the Form Tutor, Year Leader, Subject Teacher or Subject Leader depending on the nature of the matter raised.

The usual approach is to speak to the student's Form Tutor in the first instance, or to contact the School Office to arrange an appointment to discuss the concern with the appropriate member of staff. At all times the staff will make every effort to help to resolve the issue. On the rare occasion that parents feel they must state their concern formally, the School has defined procedures for handling complaints.

Complaints

The procedure is to contact the student's Form Tutor or Year Leader in the first instance, or contact the School Office to arrange an appointment to discuss your complaint with the relevant member of staff.

The School's policy has been prepared using Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. It is worth noting that both compliments and complaints are reported to the Governors' Management Committee.

External Complaints

Complaints from members of the public who are unrelated to any current student should in the first instance be put in writing and sent to the School addressed for the attention of the Headteacher.

In summary, the procedure is divided into three stages:

Stage 1 aims to resolve the concern through informal contact at the appropriate level in school.

Stage 2 is the first formal stage where written complaints are considered by the Headteacher.

Stage 3 is the next step once Stage 2 is complete. It involves a complaints review panel made up of Governors plus at least one person who is independent of the management and running of the School.

Beyond the Governing Body, the final recourse for a complainant is to the ESFA. An individual can complain to the ESFA only if:

- a. There is undue delay or if the School did not comply with its own complaints procedure when considering a complaint,
- b. The School is in breach of its funding agreement with the Secretary of State, or
- c. The School has failed to comply with any other legal obligation.

How each of these stages operates is explained below:

Stage 1 – Your initial contact with the School

1. Many concerns will be dealt with informally when you make them known to us.
2. You will either receive contact by telephone or in writing as soon as possible after your concern has been made known to us. All members of staff know how to refer, if necessary, to the appropriate person with responsibility for particular issues raised by you. He or she will make a clear note of the details and will check later to make sure that the matter has been followed up.
3. We will ensure that you are clear what action or monitoring of the situation, if any, has been agreed.
4. We will ensure that we speak directly to all appropriate persons who may be able to assist us with our enquiries into your concern.
5. We will discuss with you (normally within ten working days) the progress of our enquiries. You will have the opportunity of asking for the matter to be considered further, once we have responded to your concern.
6. If you are still dissatisfied following this informal approach, your concern will become a formal complaint and we will deal with it at the next stage.

Stage 2 - Formal consideration of your complaint

This stage in our procedures deals with written complaints. It applies where you are not happy with the informal approach to dealing with your concern, as outlined under Stage 1 above.

1. Normally, your written complaint should be addressed to the Headteacher. If, however, your complaint concerns the Headteacher personally, it should be sent to the School marked "For the attention of the Chair of Governors".
2. We will acknowledge your complaint in writing as soon as possible after receiving it. Every effort will be made to respond within three working days.
3. We will refer you to our website for a copy of these procedures with the acknowledgement.
4. Normally we would expect to respond in full within ten working days but if this is not possible we will write to explain the reason for the delay and let you know when we hope to be able to provide a full response.
5. As part of our consideration of your complaint, we may invite you to a meeting to discuss the complaint and provide any details required. If you wish, you can ask someone to accompany you to help you explain the reasons for your complaint.
6. The Headteacher, or Chair of Governors may also be accompanied by a suitable person if they wish.
7. Following the meeting, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will, where necessary, talk to witnesses and take statements from others involved. If the complaint centres on a student, we will talk to the student concerned and, where appropriate, others present at the time of the incident in question.
8. We may talk to students with a parent or carer present, unless this would delay the investigation of a serious or urgent complaint, or where a student has specifically said that she would prefer the parent or carer not to be involved. In such circumstances, we will ensure that another member of staff, with whom the pupil feels comfortable, is present.
9. If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.
10. The Headteacher or Chair of Governors will keep written, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation.
11. Once we have established all the relevant facts, we will send you a written response to your complaint. This will give a full explanation of the Headteacher's or Chair of Governors' decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, we will indicate what we are proposing to do. We may invite you to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of our commitment to building and maintaining good relations with you.
12. The person investigating your complaint may decide that we have done all we can to resolve the complaint, in which case we may use our discretion to close the complaint at this point. Please see the next page for further information about this process.
13. If we do not close the complaint after Stage 2, you may wish to proceed to Stage 3, as described below.

Closure of complaints

Very occasionally, a school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied.

We will do all we can to help to resolve a complaint against the school but sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of "agreeing to disagree".

If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the Headteacher, Chair of Governors or anyone else – this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from our responsibility to look after the interests of all the students in our care.

For this reason, we are entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where we feel that we have taken all reasonable action to resolve the complaint.

In exceptional circumstances, closure may occur before a complaint has reached Stage 3 of the procedures described in this document. This is because a complaints panel takes considerable time and effort to set up and we must be confident that it is likely to assist the process of investigating the complaint.

The Chair of Governors may decide, therefore, that every reasonable action has been undertaken to resolve the complaint and that a complaints review panel would not help to move things forward. This does not, of course, prevent you from referring your complaint to the ESFA.

Stage 3 - Consideration by a complaints review panel

- If your concern has already been through Stages 1 and 2 and you are not happy with the outcome, your concern will be escalated to a complaints review panel to consider. This is a formal process, and your ultimate recourse at school level.
- The purpose of this arrangement is to give your complaint a hearing in front of a panel of at least three independent people who have no prior knowledge of the details of the complaint and who can, therefore, consider it without prejudice. The panel will always have at least one member who is independent of the management and running of the school.
- The aim of a complaints review panel is to resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and the parent. We recognise, however, that it may sometimes only be possible to establish facts and make recommendations which will reassure you that we have taken your complaint seriously.
- The panel will have access to the existing record of the complaint's progress.

The complaints review panel operates according to the following formal procedures:

1. The Clerk to the Governing Body will aim to arrange for the panel meeting to take place within **20 working** days of the date the complaint was formally **escalated to Stage 3**.
2. The Clerk will ask you whether you wish to provide any **further written documentation** in support of your complaint. You can include witness statements, or ask witnesses to give evidence in person, if you wish.
3. The Headteacher will be asked to prepare a **written report** for the panel. Other members of staff directly involved in matters raised in your complaint will also be asked to prepare reports or statements.
4. The Clerk will inform you, the Headteacher, any relevant witnesses and members of the panel by letter, at least **five working days** in advance, of the date, time and place of the meeting
5. With the letter, the Clerk will send you all relevant correspondence, reports and documentation about the complaint and ask whether you wish to submit **further written evidence** to the panel.
6. The letter will explain what will happen at the panel meeting and the Clerk will also inform you that **you are entitled to be accompanied** to the meeting. The choice of person to accompany you is your own, but it is usually best to involve someone in whom you have confidence but who is not directly connected with the school. They are there to give you support but also to witness the proceedings and to speak on your behalf if you wish.

7. With the agreement of the Chair of the panel, the Headteacher may invite **members of staff** directly involved in matters raised by you to attend the meeting,
8. As a general rule, no evidence or witnesses **previously undisclosed** should be introduced into the meeting by any of the participants. If either party wishes to do so, the meeting will be adjourned so that the other party has a fair opportunity to consider and respond to the new evidence.
9. The Chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly **minuted**. Please understand that any decision to share the minutes with you, the complainant, is a matter for the panel's discretion and you do not have an automatic right to see or receive a copy. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.
10. Normally, the written outcome of the panel meeting, which will be sent to you, should give you all the information you require. If, however, you feel that you would like to have a **copy of the minutes** it would be helpful if you could indicate this in advance. If the panel is happy for the minutes to be copied to you, the Clerk can then be asked to make the necessary redaction.
11. During the meeting, you can expect there to be opportunities for:
 - you to explain your complaint;
 - you to hear the school's response from the Headteacher;
 - you to question the Headteacher about the complaint;
 - you to be questioned by the Headteacher about the complaint;
 - the panel members to be able to question you and the Headteacher;
 - any party to have the right to call witnesses (subject to the Chair's approval) and all parties to have the right to question all witnesses;
 - you and the Headteacher to make a final statement.
12. In closing the meeting, the Chair will explain that the panel will now consider its decision and that written notice of the decision will be sent to the Headteacher and yourself **within two weeks**. All participants other than the panel and the Clerk will then leave.
13. The panel will then consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:
 - reach a unanimous, or at least a majority, decision on the complaint;
 - decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint;
 - recommend, where appropriate, to the governing body changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that similar problems do not happen again.
14. Details of the panel's findings and recommendations will be sent to the complainant and, where relevant, the person being complained about **within two weeks** of the panel hearing. The letter will explain what further recourse, beyond the Governing Body, is available to you. Details of the panel's findings and recommendations will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher.
15. We will keep a copy of all correspondence and notes on file in the School's records but separate from pupils' personal records. All 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 2008 Act requests access to them.