
PARENTAL CONCERNS POLICY

Person(s) Responsible:	Co-Principals
Governors' Committee:	Resources Committee
Last Review Date:	Summer 2016
Next Review Date:	Summer 2018
Status:	Statutory

Introduction

Collingwood College aims to establish and promote effective communication with all parents/carers, in the interests of their children's education and personal development. We believe that our students feel more secure when they receive consistent messages from home and College. The views of our students and parents/carers are always welcomed at Collingwood, including the expression of any concerns. For the College's part we undertake to inform parents/carers, as soon as possible, about any issues of concern to Collingwood, so that we can gain co-operation from home in resolving them.

Preventing Problems

At Collingwood College we communicate regularly with parents/carers, in order to keep them informed of all aspects of College life. We have:

- Our dedicated Parent Communication System, available on the Parent Portal, which we urge parents to use when communicating with the College;
- The Student Planner with space for College-to-Home and Home-to-College communication;
- The secure Parent Portal which gives access to a range of 'real time' information about individual students;
- Academic Review Days;
- Parental Consultation Evenings;
- Parent/Carer Focus groups;
- The annual Parent/Carer Survey, which supplements OFSTED's Parent View website which can be found at <http://parentview.ofsted.gov.uk/parent-view-results/survey/result/23863/current> ;
- Letters from the Co-Principals, Members of the Leadership Team, Heads of Faculty, Year Managers and Heads of Departments, as appropriate;
- Curriculum information leaflets for parents;
- Themed Evenings e.g. on Options, Alternative Provision or the UCAS process;
- The College Prospectus;
- The Collingwood News;
- Collingwood College's website www.collingwoodcollege.com ;
- The Home School Agreement, which sets out the basis of our partnership with parents/carers;

Communication is vital from both College and home. We believe that our vigilance in maintaining frequent and effective communications between College and home is the most effective way of preventing concerns arising.

How do we respond to parental concerns?

The Informal Stage

If a parent/carer has any concern at all about their child's education or welfare, we always ask in the first instance that they contact the student's form tutor, subject teacher, Head of Department or Year Manager by using the Parent Concerns email address shown above. This address is monitored regularly and all emails are acknowledged and tracked to ensure that a timely response is made. Email traffic through this address is also monitored fortnightly by the Senior Leadership Team.

If the concern relates to a child protection or safeguarding issue, there is a different set of procedures, which MUST be followed (Surrey Safeguarding Children's Board Procedures). In such cases parents/carers should contact Surrey County Council Contact Centre 03456 009 009.

All concerns raised will be treated seriously and courteously. Parents/carers will be given the opportunity to make their concerns known and staff must be given time to properly investigate

them in order for the matter to be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. It is important that parents/carers have confidence in these procedures and know that the matter will be investigated impartially and dealt with as quickly as possible. Resolving concerns involves balancing the rights and responsibilities of students, parents/carers and College staff; there should be recognition that responsibility rests with each of these parties.

To comply with equalities legislation, Collingwood staff will be sensitive to the individual needs and circumstances of the parents/carers. Parents/carers will not be excluded from the process because of any difficulties they may have in representing themselves either in writing or in person. We recognise that some people may need help in pursuing their concern and consideration may be given to putting them in touch with a suitable agency, which can help them.

The investigation of an expression of parental concern will not deal with staff disciplinary matters. If, however, during the course of considering the concern, it is concluded that disciplinary procedures should be initiated, the College will consider this as a separate matter.

Confidentiality should be maintained at all times by all concerned. All conversations and correspondence must be treated with discretion. However, parents/carers will need to accept that some sharing of information within the College will be inevitable, if the complaint is to be investigated fully and fairly. This will be done with sensitivity and will take into account confidentiality. Parents/carers should feel confident that the matter will not disadvantage their child.

Collingwood College is mindful of the Data Protection Act and staff are not allowed to disclose personal information relating to third parties, i.e. other students, other parents, staff etc.

Anonymous expressions of concern, whilst difficult to manage and resolve, will be recorded and referred to the Co-Principals or Chair of Governors in the same way as other complaints. The fact that a complaint is from an anonymous source does not in itself justify a decision not to investigate the matter, nor will it rule out referral to other procedures as appropriate, e.g. child protection. Where the concern relates to the conduct of a College Governor, a recommended protocol is available in **Appendix 2** of this document.

In most cases the member of staff who is dealing with the concern will respond verbally. This stage of the process seeks to resolve the issue of concern as informally as possible. A written response will only be provided, if this seems to be the best way of making the process or the outcome clear.

Where a response (verbal or written) has been received, but is considered by parents/carers to be unsatisfactory, the Co-Principals should be informed within 10 working days that further investigation is required (Stage One).

Where the concern relates to the specific actions of one or more members of staff, parents/carers should initially contact or meet with one of the Co-Principals to discuss the problem. In the rare circumstances where the complaint is against one or both of the Co-Principals **and is of a serious nature**, the parents/carers should contact the Chairman of Governors via the College and proceed to Stage Two of the process

Timescales

Legal opinion indicates that school leaders and Governors must be prepared to investigate and review complaints up to a year after the event and even after a student has left the College. However, parents/carers are urged to raise matters of concern at the earliest opportunity in order to facilitate a thorough examination of the evidence while it is 'fresh'.

Our experience has shown that in the majority of cases concerns raised by parents/carers can be most easily resolved at the informal stage. The College is committed to responding to concerns raised by parents/carers in a timely manner and whilst every attempt to respond within 5 working

days will be made, some issues may need investigation within the College; thus the College undertakes to respond to any concern within 10 working days. There may of course be occasions when circumstances make it impossible for the College to respond fully within even this time period, in which case, the College will keep parents/carers fully informed throughout the process of addressing the concern.

PROCEDURE FOR DEALING FORMALLY WITH SERIOUS CONCERNS

Stage 1 In the unlikely event of there being a serious concern that a parent/carer cannot have satisfactorily resolved through an informal contact with the form/class teacher, Head of Department or Year Manager, there is a procedure, which must be adhered to, which will allow the concern to be properly dealt with by the College. In such circumstances, the parent/carer should state the concern in writing to the Co-Principals. All expressions of concern will be acknowledged. The Co-Principals will look into the issues that have been raised and respond once the relevant facts have been established. In some cases a meeting with one of the Co-Principals may be required.

Parents/carers may be accompanied to any meeting by a friend, relative, representative or advocate, who can speak on their behalf. They must, however, inform the College whom they intend to bring to the meeting and in what capacity they are attending e.g. friend, interpreter etc. The College will endeavour to facilitate interpreting facilities, if necessary, provided that notice of such a requirement is given. A note taker may be present to record the main points of the discussion and, if so, a copy of the notes will be provided for all those present.

Where necessary, the Co-Principals will investigate further. The Co-Principals' investigation notes and, where applicable, video evidence are covered by the Data Protection Act 1998 in so much as they are likely to contain personal information about other students or staff. They will therefore not be available to parents/carers.

Once all relevant facts have been established, one of the Co-Principals will make contact or arrange a meeting to discuss/resolve the matter directly. A written response will include a full explanation of the decision and the reasons for it. Where appropriate, this will include what action the College will take to resolve the complaint.

Where the Co-Principals consider that disciplinary action, for either a staff member or a student is required, parents/carers will be informed that appropriate action has been taken, but the specific sanction will remain confidential.

Should the complaint not be resolved, mediation between parents/carers and the College may be available from the Surrey County Council Area Education Officer's (AEO) Team before proceeding to the next stage. The AEO Team will remain objective and impartial throughout all the stages of the complaints procedure.

Stage 2 In the unlikely event that the Co-Principals have been unable to resolve the parental concern to the satisfaction of the parent/carer, the next stage is for the parent/carer to write to the Chairman of Governors (c/o Collingwood College) stating the grounds for the complaint and the desired outcome. The Chairman of Governors or a nominated Governor will then investigate the issue and respond directly to the parent/carer within 10 working days of receipt of the letter. In some cases, it may be necessary for the Chairman of Governors or his/her nominated representative to convene a meeting to discuss the matter with the parent/carer. The Area Education Officer may be invited to attend this meeting in order to provide further mediation.

Stage 3 It is not possible to go straight to Stage 3 in this procedure. Stages 1 and 2 must first have been completed in order to try and achieve a resolution.

This may be the last chance for a solution or compromise to be reached; every effort should be made to reach agreement through mediation or reconciliation as part of the outcome. The advice

and expertise of the AEO Team may be particularly helpful at this stage. It should be noted that the AEO Team may be involved in advising both parties of their rights, responsibilities and the protocol to be followed. It is the role of the AEO Team to remain impartial and objective throughout the process and support a resolution to the complaint.

If a parent/carer wishes to lodge a formal complaint, he/she must write to or email the Clerk to Governors at the College (tc@collingwood.surrey.sch.uk) stating the wish to make a formal complaint for consideration by a Review Panel. All complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days.

Within 20 working days of receiving the formal complaint, the Clerk to the Review Panel will convene a small group of 3 independent Governors from other schools, who will have had no prior involvement with the complaint and will look in detail at the issues that have been raised. The purpose of Stage 3 is not to re-investigate the complaint, but to review how the College has dealt with it.

In the interests of equality and fairness, independent panel reviews will normally be held at a time and venue, which is mutually convenient for all parties to attend. Every possible effort will be made to find a neutral venue for the meeting.

The panel will normally invite the parent/carer, the Co-Principals and the Stage 2 investigating Governor (the Chairman of Governors or his/her nominee) to attend the meeting to explain their actions. The parent/carer will be notified in writing of the right to be accompanied to the review meeting by a friend/advocate/interpreter. The letter will also explain how the meeting will be conducted (See **Appendix 1**). If the parent/carer chooses to decline this invitation or fails to attend, the review will go ahead in private (without all invitees) using only the written evidence.

Prior to the meeting, both the College and the parent/carer have the right to submit any further documents relevant to the complaint. Both parties should send further documentation to the Clerk at least 10 working days before the review meeting. All concerned should receive any relevant documents at least 5 working days prior to the review meeting. Only in exceptional circumstances will new evidence be accepted after this time and this will be at the discretion of the Chair of the Review Panel.

The Clerk to the Review Panel will be in attendance to take notes of the proceedings of the panel and a representative of the Area Education Officer team may also be present, if invited, to provide procedural advice and witness the fairness and rigour of the process.

The Clerk to the Review Panel will convene the meeting and will distribute all the paperwork. The panel will elect a Chair for the review hearing.

The panel may request that members of staff produce a written report, if appropriate. The panel will not interview children or invite students as witnesses to the review meeting.

It is the responsibility of the Chair of the panel to ensure that the Clerk makes accurate notes of the meeting and that the notes are distributed to all parties involved. The minutes are the property of the Governing Body.

A written statement outlining the decision of the panel will be sent to the parent/carer and the Co-Principals. If any disciplinary action is to be taken against a member of staff or student then, to protect his/her rights, only the phrase "appropriate action has or will be taken" will be used.

If the review panel believes that the procedure has not been correctly followed, or that the evidence does not support the conclusion taken at Stage 2, or that the process is flawed in some way, it can uphold the complaint and can, in some circumstances, direct the College to re-

investigate the matter. The panel will not simply overturn the decision taken by the Co-Principals or the Investigating Governor simply because the parent/carer does not agree with the outcome.

At the conclusion of the meeting the Chair will explain that the panel will consider its decision and write to all parties with the outcome of the review within 5 working days.

A report and any recommendations will be made to the College's Governing Body at the next full meeting.

Further Action

The Education Funding Agency (EFA) carries out certain functions in relation to Academies on behalf of the Secretary of State. One of the main functions is to ensure that Academies comply with the Funding Agreement entered into with the Secretary of State. If any complaints or concerns arise in relation to breaches of the terms of Academies' Funding Agreements, the EFA will seek to resolve these with an Academy without the need for parents and pupils to make a formal complaint. However, there will be issues where parents of students at Academies and students themselves have complained to the Academy and such complaints have been considered by the Academy in accordance with its complaints procedure and this has failed to resolve the matter. In these circumstances the complainant can complain to the EFA and the complaint will be considered in accordance with EFA procedures.

OFSTED may consider complaints relating to the work of a school as a whole.

The Freedom of Information Act gives parents/carers the right to ask for official information from public authorities. If it is thought that the College has wrongly withheld information or incorrectly handled a request, a complaint can be made to The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, SK9 5AF. Please note that complaints made under the Freedom of Information Act should be submitted within six months of the outcome of internal review being issued.

For most complaints about any School/College, the decision of the independent panel is the last stage of the procedure and there is no further recourse.

Appendix 3 of this document gives guidance on a recommended procedure for dealing with persistent and unreasonable complainants.

Procedure for the Conduct of a Complaint Review at Stage 3

1. The Chair of the Review Panel will invite everybody into the room at the same time. S/he will facilitate introductions and clarify roles.
2. The Chair will explain to all present that the purpose of the meeting is to review how the complaint has been managed, resolve any differences and, if possible, achieve reconciliation between the academy school and the complainant. However, it has been recognised that sometimes it may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations that demonstrate the complaint has been taken seriously.
3. The Chair will then outline the proposed procedure for the meeting. He/she should listen to any concerns about the procedure, but has the final decision about the arrangements:
 - The complainant, or their representative, will outline the complaint.
 - The Co-Principals will be given the opportunity to seek clarification from the complainant.
 - The Review Panel may seek clarification from the complainant.
 - The Co-Principals and/or the nominated Governor (Stage 3) will be given the opportunity to respond.
 - The complainant will be given the opportunity to seek clarification from the Co-Principals and/or Nominated Governor.
 - The Review Panel may seek clarification from the Co-Principals or Nominated Governor.
 - The Co-Principals will be given the opportunity to summarise how he/she tried to resolve the complaint.
 - The complainant will be given the opportunity to summarise why he/she feels the College has not properly addressed the complaint.
 - All parties will then leave the meeting. The panel will then deliberate. However, if the AEO team member is present he/she may remain, along with the Clerk to the Review Panel, to offer procedural advice.
4. The panel will then arrive at its decision. This will cover:
 - Findings on the complaint.
 - Appropriate action to be taken by the College.
 - Any recommended changes to the College's systems or procedures.
5. The decision will be notified to all parties, in writing, **within 5 working days**.

Recommended Protocol for Managing Complaints about School Governors

Complaints about individual Governors are relatively rare. They generally relate to the conduct of a Governor within school, or whilst on school business; they may include breaches of policy or confidentiality. **Complaints about the conduct of Governors outside of school, in a private capacity, do not fall within the remit of this policy.**

The same good practice principles, already set out in this guidance, apply to the management of complaints about individual Governors. A two stage procedure applies and this is normally managed by the Chair of Governors in person, or, in the event of the complaint being about the Chair, by the Vice Chair.

Stage 1

The parent/carer should present the complaint either verbally or in writing to the Chair of Governors. If assistance is required the College will facilitate this. In the case of written complaints, the Chair of Governors will acknowledge receipt **in writing within three school working days** and propose a target date for providing a response.

The Chair of Governors will offer to meet with the parent/carer to clarify the nature of the concern and to seek further information before embarking on his/her investigation. Meeting notes may be taken.

The Chair of Governors will begin investigation of the key issues. Please note that pupils will not be interviewed by Governors.

The Chair will report his/her findings and any recommendations in writing (and verbally if he/she feels this is necessary). This will usually be **within ten school working days**. The Chair will give reasons for the decision to uphold, partially uphold the complaint or overturn the complaint. If there is good reason for any delay the Chair will make it known and indicate a revised target date for the completion of the investigation.

If the parent/carer is not satisfied with the Chair's response, he/she should request a review of how the complaint has been managed within **ten school working days** of receipt of the response.

The Clerk to the Review Panel will write to you to acknowledge receipt of the written request within **5 school working days**. The acknowledgement will confirm that a panel of three independent Governors will review the complaint within **20 school working days** of receiving the request, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

A further letter will explain the right of all parties to submit documentation relevant to the complaint. Three possible dates should be offered, but if these are unsuitable then the review may be conducted in private by the panel. The clerk to the panel should be present to advise on procedure, record the discussion and record the decision; the clerk will also produce the final letter to the complainant.

If the Chair of Governors (at Stage 1) or the Review Panel (Stage 2) upholds the complaint, and feels that further action against a Governor is required, this will be discussed with the full governing body as a confidential item (Part Two business) and appropriate sanctions will be implemented. This matter will be subject to the Data Protection Act and will not be reported in the public domain.

Unreasonably Persistent Complainants and Unreasonable Behaviour Procedure

Only the Co-Principals with the agreement of the Chair of Governors, may deem a complainant 'unreasonably persistent'.

The Co-Principals will ensure that there is sufficient evidence available to justify the decision. They will consult with the College's legal services provider to confirm that the evidence is sufficient.

The Chair of Governors will write to the complainant to explain the decision and the way that future complaints will be dealt with. Any restrictions imposed will be appropriate and proportionate.

Some or all of the following actions may be taken, depending on the particular circumstances of the case:

- Insisting that no member of staff should meet the complainant on his/her own;
- Restricting responses to telephone calls and emails from the complainant to specified days and times;
- Requiring that all future contacts with the College are in writing, except in emergencies; this includes contacts with members of the governing body, who should only be contacted at the school address;
- Merely acknowledging correspondence from the complainant that raises issues that have already been dealt with;
- After consulting the academy schools legal services provider, banning the complainant from the academy school premises where the complainant's behaviour constitutes a nuisance or disturbance, with any appointments with staff to be agreed in writing via the Co-Principals.

All correspondence from the complainant will be considered and any new **and** substantive issues will be addressed and a reply sent to the complainant.

New complaints from people who have been deemed unreasonably persistent complainants in the past will be treated on their merits.

If a complainant is deemed to be unreasonably persistent, this will not reflect on the College's treatment of his/her child.