



PLYMOUTH COLLEGE

PARENTAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Including Early Years Foundation Stage

Last reviewed:	September 2026
Next review date:	September 2027
Responsibility:	Head

Introduction

The College has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents or guardians do have a complaint (other than in relation to a disciplinary matter which is the subject matter of a separate procedure), they can expect it to be treated with care by the College in accordance with this Procedure, which is made available to all parents of current pupils on the College's website or via the Head's Office. A copy of the Procedure can also be made available in larger print or more accessible format if required.

The aim of this policy is to ensure that complaints are managed sensitively, efficiently, and at an appropriate level, and resolved in a timely manner. We will endeavour to resolve every concern in a positive way, with a focus on putting right a matter which may have gone wrong, and, where necessary, reviewing our procedures and systems as appropriate.

N.B. This procedure does not apply to any complaints pertaining to school exclusions.

Definitions - Feedback, Concern or Complaint?

To ensure clear communication, the College categorizes parental input into three levels:

Feedback

Parents or guardians may sometimes wish to pass on feedback to the College without a need for a response, but with an expectation that their voice will be heard and feedback taken on board.

Concern

Parents or guardians may have a worry or doubt over an important issue and require reassurance. The College takes such informal concerns seriously and endeavours to resolve them as quickly as possible.

What constitutes a complaint

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent or guardian believes that the College has done something wrong, or failed to do something that it should have done, or has acted unfairly.

For the purposes of this Policy, a complaint by a current parent(s) or guardian(s) will either be:

(i) An issue raised by a parent or guardian which they explicitly state that they wish to be treated as a complaint,

or;

(ii) An issue raised by a parent or guardian which is escalated to a member of the Senior Leadership Team because it has not been able to be resolved by other members of staff. In these circumstances, this will be recorded as a complaint, even if the parent has not explicitly requested it.

A complaint may be made about the College as a whole, about a specific department in the College or about an individual member of staff.

Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively. Parents can be reassured that we listen to them and take them seriously.

If you are in any doubt about whether a complaint should be passed on, please do contact your child's Form Tutor, Class Teacher, Head of Year, relevant Boarding staff or the Business Manager in the first instance to discuss the matter.

Stage 2 complaints should be addressed to the Head's Office via head@plymouthcollege.com. An appropriate senior member of staff will then be allocated to look into the matter and an acknowledgment issued.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

Complaints received during term time will generally be acknowledged **within 2 working days** of receipt and during school holidays, as soon as is reasonably practicable. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing. The College seeks to resolve complaints as quickly as possible for the benefit of all parties. The College aims to **complete the first two stages of the procedure within 25 working days** during term time, and as soon as practicable during the College holidays. However, a Stage 2 complaint made within two weeks of the end of term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and potential unavailability of staff for the investigation to be carried out properly, however, an overall time frame in this case would be limited to **40 working days**.

Should a complaint reach Stage 3 and require a Panel Hearing, this will generally be completed within **a further 20 working days of receipt of a request for a Panel Hearing**, if this takes place in term time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods.

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, 'working days' refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. This means that during the school holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the College will do what is reasonably practical to avoid delay

Recording Complaints

A written record of all concerns and complaints that cannot be resolved informally will be made and, where applicable, may include the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of Parent
- Name of Pupil
- Brief statement of issue
- Location of file (if applicable)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Staff member handling the issue
- Copies of all correspondence on this issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Brief statement of outcome

The written record will record action taken by the College regardless of whether a complaint is upheld.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and **informally**.
- All members of staff are encouraged to deal with a parental or pupil concern that lies within their area of responsibility. However, if parents have a complaint they should normally contact their child's subject teacher, form teacher, tutor or (if appropriate) Boarding House Lead. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the person cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult either a Head of Department, Head of Year, Senior Deputy Head, or one of the Deputy Heads.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, one of the Senior Leadership Team or the Head will usually be referred to the relevant form teacher, subject teacher, class teacher, Boarding House Lead unless that person deems it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.
- The form teacher, tutor, subject teacher or Boarding House Lead will make a **written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received**. Should the matter not be resolved **within 5 working days** or in the event that the form teacher, teacher, tutor or Boarding House Lead and the parent **fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then parents 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 parents should **put their complaint in writing** to the Head. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head or another senior member of staff will meet / speak to the parents or pupils concerned, normally **within 5 working days** of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. During a holiday period, complaints will be dealt with as swiftly as possible, but absence of staff may well lead to delays.

- If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out.
- **Written records** will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the College 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. This will be within **a further 15 working days of the parent/pupil meeting** during term time and **a further 20 working days during holiday periods**. The Head will provide reasons for the decision.
- **If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3** of this Procedure.

If a complaint is made during the holiday period, every effort will be made to adhere to the timescale above and parents will be kept fully informed if this is not possible due to the unavailability of staff.

Although all formal complaints must be made in writing to the Head, this does not mean that the formal stage is automatically triggered whenever a concern is expressed in writing to the Head, which may include a handwritten or email complaint. Complaints will usually only progress to the formal stage after first being considered at the informal stage and only then if the complainant intends to escalate a matter to the formal stage. If the Head is contacted directly by a parent with an initial complaint or concern, they may ask a Senior Deputy Head/Deputy Head to deal with the matter in the first instance in line with the informal Stage 1 process.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they will be referred to the Clerk to the Management Board who has been authorised to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. This request should be made in writing, setting out the grounds for appeal (with supporting evidence), within **5 working days** of the receipt of the written outcome of the Stage 2 process.
- A panel hearing will take place unless the parent(s) later indicates that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed further. If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, this does not remove the College's obligation to hold the hearing in line with this policy. The arrangements for the hearing will be reasonable in order to facilitate the parents' attendance.
- 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 shall be not only outside the College's workforce and not a member of the College's Management Board, but also not involved with the management and running of the College (i.e. independent). Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the College's Management Board. The Clerk, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 15 working days.
- 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 5 working days prior to the hearing. At this stage, this will be a full-merits hearing of the complaint, not merely a judicial review style check that process was followed.

- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing. This may be by relatives, teachers or friends. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate and the companion should not be a lawyer. It must be noted that parents' right to request and attend a panel is not forfeit because they have threatened or initiated legal proceedings.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' 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 may make recommendations, which it shall complete within 5 working days of the hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations, will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the College's Management Board and, where relevant, the person complained about.

Parents and pupils can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially by the proprietor and the Head. Correspondence, statements and records 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; where disclosure is required in the course of the College's inspection; or where any other legal obligation prevails. From September 2020, all complaints which do not have a safeguarding implication will be retained for a minimum period of 7 years. If the complaint has a safeguarding implication, documentation will be preserved for the term of the Independent inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.

Anonymous complaints may not be pursued (other than in issues of child protection) although they will be kept on file.

Unreasonable Complaints or Persistent Correspondence

Plymouth College is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially. While Plymouth College does not typically restrict a complainant's contact with the College, we ask individuals to limit communication regarding their complaint while it is actively under review. Sending repeated correspondence via mail, phone, email, or text message is unhelpful and risks delaying a resolution. Furthermore, Plymouth College expects all members of our community to treat staff with respect. Unreasonable behaviour - including abusive, offensive, or threatening conduct - will not be tolerated, and prompt action will be taken to safeguard staff. Further details can be found in Appendix A.

The number of complaints received during an academic year will be notified to parents on an annual basis – see Appendix B.

Special Circumstances and Specific Provisions

Former pupils

A complaint raised in relation to a child who has left the College will not fall under the scope of this procedure and will be dealt with in line with current guidelines or legislation depending on the nature of the complaint. The child is taken off roll on the final day of the term in which they leave. Parents are therefore advised to raise any issues with the College in a timely manner so that it can be addressed and resolved promptly.

Complaints regarding the Head

Should the formal complaint relate to the Head, the complaint should be addressed to the College's Management Board care of the Chair - Nicholas Grenfell-Marten, at nick.grenfell-marten@galaxyeducation.world.

EYFS pupils

Parents of children in EYFS have the right to complain directly to the Registration Authority (OFSTED) on 0300 123 1231 should they believe that the College is not meeting the EYFS requirements.

Furthermore, in the case of complaints from parents of children in EYFS, a written record of all complaints and their outcomes/action taken must be made available to the Registration Authority (Ofsted and ISI) on request.

A record of complaints is kept for a minimum of three years and any complaints relating to pupils **in the EYFS** will be held for at least three years. Being OFSTED registered, **the College will notify the complainant of the outcome within 28 calendar days of the receipt** of the complaint (regardless of school holidays). The College will provide OFSTED/ISI with a written record of complaints and any action taken on request. At any stage of the complaints procedure parents may communicate with, appeal or complain to OFSTED www.ofsted.gov.uk and/or the Independent Schools Inspectorate www.isi.net.

Parents can make a complaint to ISI or Ofsted and contacts are below:

Independent Schools Inspectorate Ground Floor 9-12 Cap House Long Lane London EC1A 9HA

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD Telephone 020 7600 0100 or 020 7710 9900

Complaints regarding Financial Matters

Queries or complaints relating to school fees, extras, deposits, or bursaries should be submitted in writing directly to the **Business Manager** in the first instance. When a complaint concerns only the matter of finance such as fees in lieu which remain outstanding, the matter of the fees owed alone falls outside the scope of this procedure. The Head/Business Manager of the College remains responsible for all financial decisions.

Plymouth College is part of the Galaxy Global Education Group.

The College is managed by the Colleges' Management Board of the Galaxy Global Education Group (which is responsible for Group Governance and Local Advisory Board Liaison,

Co-ordinating Learning Initiatives & Setting Group KPIs, Regulatory Compliance, Safeguarding Oversight & Student Voice). The Local Advisory Board (LAB) is an advisory sub-committee of the Galaxy Global Education Group Schools' Management Board, providing local insight, support, and challenge to the College's leadership in regards to educational standards and school improvement, safeguarding and welfare, community and stakeholder engagement, compliance and reporting.

The Chair of the LAB is appointed by the Chair of the Colleges' Management Board and the LAB is composed of 3-4 local members appointed by the Chair of the Colleges' Management Board (with whom formal governance authority rests) and approved by the Board of Directors of the Galaxy Global Education Group.

APPENDIX A

Unreasonable Behaviour

Plymouth College considers behaviour to be unreasonable when it hinders our ability to properly consider a complaint due to the frequency, nature, or tone of the complainant's contact. Examples include, but are not limited to, when a complainant:

- Refuses to clearly articulate their complaint, state the specific grounds, or identify the desired resolution, despite offers of assistance.
- Refuses to engage constructively with the investigation process.
- Refuses to acknowledge that certain issues fall outside the remit of the College's complaints procedure.
- Insists on the complaint being handled in ways that conflict with established procedures or good administrative practice.
- Introduces irrelevant or trivial details, expecting them to be formally investigated and commented upon.
- Raises an excessive number of detailed but minor questions and demands immediate answers outside reasonable timescales.
- Makes unfounded allegations against staff members handling the matter and demands their replacement.
- Unilaterally alters the basis or scope of the complaint while the investigation is underway.
- Repeatedly submits the same complaint after previous investigations or formal responses have concluded it is groundless or resolved.
- Refuses to accept the final findings of an investigation once the College's complaints process has been fully and properly concluded.
- Demands unrealistic or disproportionate outcomes.
- Consumes excessive College resources through frequent, lengthy, or overly complex interactions in person, in writing, by email, or over the phone while the matter is under review.
- Breaches the confidentiality of the complaints process.
- Posts inappropriate or damaging content on social media platforms or other public media.
- Employs threats, coercion, or intimidation.
- Uses abusive, offensive, or discriminatory language, or displays violent behaviour.
- Deliberately supplies false or misleading information.

This list is non-exhaustive. Plymouth College will evaluate whether a complainant's conduct is unreasonable on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the surrounding circumstances, school policy, and relevant regulatory guidelines.

Persistent Correspondence

Plymouth College recognizes that a complainant may remain dissatisfied even after all formal stages of the complaints process have been exhausted. In such cases, should the complainant attempt to reopen the same issue, the College will formally notify them that the complaints procedure has concluded and the matter is closed.

If contact regarding the closed issue continues, the College may categorize the correspondence as 'persistent' and reserve the right not to reply. However, a complaint will never be marked as 'persistent' before the entire formal procedure (i.e., through Stage 3) has been fully completed. Subsequent correspondence of this nature falls outside the scope of this policy.

AI Generated Correspondence

While the College recognizes that complainants may use AI tools to assist in drafting correspondence, submissions must clearly articulate genuine concerns relevant to the pupil. The College reserves the right to utilise automated and AI-assisted evaluation tools to assess the relevance, authenticity, contextual relevance and merit of submitted complaints.

The College may, at its discretion, request clarification or restrict correspondence where AI-generated content introduces inaccurate or non-applicable legal citations, unnecessary repetition, or excessive length that places an unreasonable administrative burden on staff time.

Vexatious Complaints

The College may occasionally receive complaints deemed vexatious. Plymouth College defines a 'vexatious' complaint as one possessing characteristics such as:

- Obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, or repetitive communication patterns.
- Rigid insistence on pursuing unmeritorious claims or seeking impractical outcomes beyond reasonable bounds.
- Unreasonable persistence in pursuing a valid claim.
- Clear intent to cause disruption, distress, or unnecessary administrative burden.
- Requests for remedy or compensation that lack genuine purpose or substance.

This list is non-exhaustive. The College reserves the right to assess vexatious conduct on a case-by-case basis in line with applicable regulations and policy.

Process for Handling Unreasonable, Persistent, or Vexatious Complaints

Plymouth College will not automatically refuse future correspondence or complaints from an individual simply because of past excessive contact; any 'persistent' designation applies to the specific subject matter or complaint itself, rather than the individual.

Where frequent contact causes significant disruption to normal operations, Plymouth College may implement a tailored communication plan. This plan may restrict communication channels or limit the frequency of contact, and will be reviewed periodically (e.g., every three to six months). The College may also request that communication occur via an authorized third party acting on the parents' behalf.

Whenever feasible, the Head or Chair of Local Advisory Board will seek to address concerns informally with the complainant before formalizing an 'unreasonable' designation. Should the behaviour persist, the College will write to the individual stating clearly why their conduct is considered unreasonable and requesting an immediate change in behaviour.

Plymouth College further reserves the right to enforce any applicable terms within the College's Terms and Conditions (Parent Contract) if, in the reasonable opinion of the Head or Chair of Local Advisory Board, a parent's behaviour is unreasonable and negatively impacts (or is likely to impact) pupil progress, staff well-being, or the College's reputation.

In the event of severe aggression or violent incidents, Plymouth College will immediately contact the police and confirm any subsequent protective measures in writing, which may include formally barring the individual from the College grounds.



I want to share important information about recent changes in the way independent schools are inspected. Although independent schools like ours are inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) rather than Ofsted, the process has been updated to align more closely with the maintained sector's inspections.

One aspect of compliance is providing essential information to parents. We are required to give you:

- the College's address, phone number, and the Head's name
- the College's registered office's address and phone number
- The Chair of School's Management Board name and contact details
- A statement about our school's ethos and goals

Additionally, I'd like to make you aware of several important policies and documents available on our website:

- Acceptable ICT Policy
- Admissions Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Behaviour Management Policy
- Complaints Procedure
- Curriculum Policy
- EAL Policy
- Exclusions Policy
- Fire Policies & Procedures
- First Aid Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Recruitment Policy
- Safeguarding & Child Protection Policy
- SEND Policy
- Statement of Ethos
- Terms and Conditions

These resources can be accessed in the Information Section on our school website. If you prefer hard copies, please let us know.

It is also a requirement of recent legislation that I inform parents annually that we have a clear and transparent procedure for dealing with any complaints and that the relevant policy document is available on the College's website or on request from the Head's Office. We hope, of course, that you will not have cause to complain; however, should you bring matters to our attention which are of concern to you, we will endeavour to do all that we can to resolve things informally in accordance with the Procedure. If a resolution cannot be reached in this way, then there is a formal process to be followed as explained in the policy. I am also required to tell you how many complaints we have had to deal with in this more formal way during the last school year, and I can report that there were no formal complaints.

To comply with regulations and keep you informed, I'm writing to you annually, in line with ISI's recommendation. Your understanding and cooperation are greatly appreciated.

Peter Watts
Head

Plymouth College
Ford Park, Plymouth
Devon, PL4 6RN
T 01752 505100

mail@plymouthcollege.com
www.plymouthcollege.com



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company no. 16067801

Yours faithfully



Peter Watts
Head



Peter Watts
Head

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INFORMATION

School's Address & Telephone Number

Plymouth College
Ford Park
Plymouth
Devon PL4 6RN

Telephone: 01752 505100

Head: Mr P Watts

Address & Telephone Number of Registered Office

Plymouth Education Limited T/A Plymouth College
Ford Park
Plymouth
Devon PL4 6RN

Telephone: 01752 505100

Name & Address for Correspondence to the Chair of the College's Management Board

The Chair of the College's Management Board
c/o The Clerk to the College's Management Board
Plymouth College
Ford Park
Plymouth
Devon PL4 6RN

Chair of School's Management Board : Mr N Grenfell-Marten



PLYMOUTH COLLEGE COMPLAINTS

Date	
Complaint From	
Nature of Complaint	
Action taken by	
Action Taken	
Signature	
Date	



APPENDIX D

*****template*****

INVESTIGATION INTO A FORMAL COMPLAINT

<i>Complete as appropriate:</i>
1. against : INSERT NAME (if applicable)
2. regarding: INSERT details
Date of Formal Complaint:
Name of Parent (& pupil if applicable) making the Complaint:
Staff Member leading the investigation:
<u>Process of the investigation</u> Source material • A statement from • A written report from • A further written report from
<u>Findings from Allegations in time order</u> Allegation 1 – Finding – Recommendation -
Allegation 2 Finding – Recommendation -
<u>Formal Complaint Outcome & School Decision</u>

APPENDIX E

Summary of timelines:

Complaint Stage / Category	Initial Acknowledgment	Key Actions & Meetings	Target Resolution / Outcome Timeline
Stage 1: Informal Resolution	N/A	Discussion with relevant staff member (e.g., Tutor, House Lead, HoD)	Resolved within 5 working days .
Stage 2: Formal Resolution	Issued upon allocation to senior staff member	Meeting/conversation with parents/pupils normally within 5 working days of receipt.	Written decision provided within a further 15 working days following the meeting.
Stage 3: Panel Hearing Request	Formal request must be submitted within 5 working days of receiving Stage 2 outcome.	Panel hearing scheduled within 15 working days of request; case materials provided 5 working days in advance.	Final written decision sent within 5 working days post-hearing.
EYFS Complaints	Handled as per standard procedure or directly via Ofsted/ISI.	Investigated in accordance with regulatory requirements.	Written outcome/notification provided within 28 calendar days .

General Note on Timeframes & School Holidays

- **Definition of Working Days:** For the purposes of this procedure, "working days" refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half-term breaks.
- **Holiday Process & Timeframes:** Complaints received during school holidays will be acknowledged as soon as reasonably practicable. While the College seeks to complete Stages 1 and 2 within **25 working days** during term time, complaints submitted during or

*within two weeks of a holiday period may take up to **40 working days** to resolve due to staff availability.*

- **Stage 2 & 3 Holiday Extensions:** *During holiday periods, written decisions following Stage 2 meetings will be provided within **20 working days** (rather than 15). Stage 3 Panel Hearings will be scheduled and completed as soon as practicable during holiday periods.*
- **EYFS Exception:** *Complaints relating to Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) pupils will be resolved and notified within **28 calendar days**, regardless of school holidays.*