COLMERS SCHOOL
& SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

Complaints Procedures Policy

2026 27

Relevant legislation and guidance	Education Act 2002; Equality Act 2010; UK GDPR; Data Protection Act 2018; DfE school complaints guidance
Linked policies	Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy; Parent and Carer Code of Conduct; Records Management Policy; Whistleblowing Policy
Review frequency	Annual
Policy owner	Headteacher
Approved by	Governing Board
Date approved	September 2026
Next review date	September 2027

Purpose and principles

Colmers School and Sixth Form College aims to resolve concerns promptly, fairly and, wherever possible, informally. This procedure is accessible, impartial and non-adversarial. It allows concerns to be fully considered, respects confidentiality and provides a clear route to an independent panel where a formal complaint remains unresolved.

Scope

Any person may complain about facilities or services provided by the school. This procedure does not apply where another statutory or school procedure is more appropriate, including pupil admissions, statutory assessment of special educational needs, school reorganisation, matters likely to require a child-protection investigation, exclusions, staff grievances, staff conduct or whistleblowing. The school will explain the correct route.

Concern and complaint

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt for which reassurance is sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about action taken or a lack of action. The school will try to resolve both informally, but a complainant may ask to begin the formal procedure where informal handling is unsuitable or has not resolved the matter.

How to raise a concern or complaint

Concerns may be raised in person, by telephone or in writing with the relevant member of staff. Formal complaints should be made in writing to the Headteacher. The school will provide reasonable help, including accepting a complaint dictated by telephone or at a meeting, interpretation and accessible formats. Anonymous complaints will be considered at the school's discretion, taking account of seriousness and available evidence.

Complaints should normally be made within three months of the incident or, where there is a series of related incidents, within three months of the last incident. The school will consider complaints outside this period where there are good reasons for the delay or exceptional circumstances.

Informal resolution

The school will acknowledge the concern and identify the most appropriate person to respond. That person will listen, clarify the desired outcome, make proportionate enquiries and seek a practical resolution. The school aims to respond within 15 school days. If more time is needed, it will explain the reason and give a revised date. Informal resolution may include an explanation, correction, apology, meeting, mediation or action to prevent recurrence. An apology does not by itself amount to an admission of legal liability.

If the matter is not resolved, the complainant may ask for it to be considered at Stage 1. The school will not refuse escalation merely because it considers the complaint unjustified.

Stage 1 Formal investigation

A formal complaint must identify what is being complained about and the outcome sought. The Headteacher will acknowledge it within three school days and appoint an impartial investigator, normally the Headteacher or a suitable senior person. If the complaint concerns the Headteacher, it must be sent to the Clerk to the Governing Board, who will arrange for the Chair or another suitably skilled governor or independent person to investigate.

The investigator will establish the facts fairly, consider relevant documents, speak to the complainant and those involved, and keep a clear record. Pupils will be interviewed only where necessary and with appropriate support. Staff may be accompanied at an interview where school procedures or fairness require it. The school will not disclose confidential employment action or personal information about others beyond what is lawful and necessary.

The school aims to issue a written Stage 1 decision within 15 school days of receipt. Complex complaints may take longer; the complainant will receive an explanation and revised date. The response will state whether each element is upheld, partly upheld or not upheld, explain the reasons, identify any appropriate remedy or learning, and explain how to request Stage 2.

Stage 2 Governing Board complaints panel

If dissatisfied with the Stage 1 response, the complainant may request a panel by writing to the Clerk within 10 school days. The request should explain why the Stage 1 response is unsatisfactory and the outcome sought. The Clerk will acknowledge the request within three school days and aim to convene the panel within 20 school days. Where this is not possible, the Clerk will explain why and offer the earliest reasonable date.

The panel will consist of three impartial people with no prior involvement in the complaint or circumstances. At least one panel member will be independent of the management and running of the school. If necessary, governors from another school or other suitably independent persons may be appointed. The panel will elect a chair.

The Clerk will agree reasonable arrangements and circulate relevant papers normally at least five school days before the meeting. New evidence submitted late will be considered only where fairness permits. The complainant may be accompanied by a friend, relative or supporter. Legal representation is not normally necessary, but the panel will consider a reasoned request. Reasonable adjustments will be made for disability, language or communication needs.

The meeting will be private and non-adversarial. Both the complainant and school may explain their case, respond to evidence and ask questions through the chair. Witnesses will attend only for the part in which they give evidence. Electronic recording is not normally permitted unless all parties agree or it is required as a reasonable adjustment. The panel may adjourn to obtain information needed for a fair decision.

The panel may uphold or reject the complaint in whole or part, decide appropriate action and recommend changes to systems or practice. The Clerk will send the reasoned decision, findings and any recommendations to the complainant and relevant school leaders normally within five school days. The decision is final within the school procedure.

Complaints about governors and the governing board

- A complaint about the Chair, Vice-Chair or an individual governor should be sent to the Clerk and investigated by a suitably skilled governor or independent person who has no conflict.
- A complaint about the Chair and Vice-Chair together, a majority of governors, or the governing board as a whole should be sent to the Clerk, who will arrange an independent investigation and, if escalation is requested, a panel of independent governors or other suitably independent persons.
- A person who investigates at Stage 1 will not sit on the Stage 2 panel.

Safeguarding and allegations

A complaint indicating that a child may be at risk will be passed immediately to the DSL and handled under the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. An allegation about an adult who works with children will be considered under KCSIE and the school's allegations procedure; LADO advice will be sought where the harm threshold may be met. The complaints procedure may be paused until safeguarding, police or disciplinary processes allow it to continue.

Records confidentiality and data protection

The school will keep a written record of formal complaints, outcomes and whether they were resolved at Stage 1 or proceeded to a panel. Panel findings and recommendations will be available for inspection by the governing board and Headteacher. Complaint records will be kept securely in accordance with the Records Management Policy and are separate from a pupil's educational record unless information properly forms part of that record.

Correspondence, statements and records will remain confidential except where access is required by law, requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector, needed for a fair process, or necessary to safeguard a child. Requests for personal information will be handled as subject access requests; requests for recorded non-personal information will be considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Information about third parties may be redacted where required.

Serial or unreasonable complaints

The school will not label a complainant unreasonable merely because they are persistent or dissatisfied. A complaint may be treated as unreasonable where conduct hinders fair consideration, for example repeated demands to revisit a completed complaint without new evidence, excessive contact, refusal to identify the issues, abusive behaviour or attempts to change the complaint continually.

Before restricting contact, the school will normally explain the concern, ask the person to modify their behaviour and consider reasonable adjustments. Any restriction will be proportionate, recorded in writing, specify permitted contact and a review date, and preserve a route for urgent safeguarding matters or a genuinely new complaint. Threats, harassment or abusive conduct may be reported to the police or addressed under the Parent and Carer Code of Conduct.

Complaint campaigns

Where the school receives many complaints based on the same subject or a template, it may publish or send a single response if this allows the issues to be answered fairly. Individual information will not be published, and materially different or personal issues will be considered separately.

Access to premises

A restriction on access to school premises is separate from the outcome of a complaint and will follow the fair, proportionate process in the Parent and Carer Code of Conduct. It will not prevent the person using this complaints procedure.

After the school procedure

If the complainant believes the school did not follow its published procedure or acted unlawfully or unreasonably in exercising education functions, they may complain to the Department for Education after completing the school's procedure. Information and the current online form are available at gov.uk/complain-about-school. The DfE will not normally reinvestigate the substance or substitute its view for the panel's decision.

Monitoring and review

The Governing Board will review this policy annually. The Headteacher and Chair will monitor themes and ensure that learning from complaints informs improvement without identifying complainants unnecessarily.