Auckland College Independent School

Every Pupil Matters, Every Pupil Counts

Complaints Policy



Document Control

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Complaints Policy

Purpose

Our school values your feedback, and we have established a clear complaint procedure to address any concerns promptly and fairly. If you ever have a complaint, please feel free to follow our established process, which includes contacting the relevant school authority or department.

Effective communication between parents and the school is essential for the success and well-being of our pupils. We appreciate your partnership in creating a positive and supportive learning environment.

This procedure is for all parents of pupils attending Auckland College Independent School. Auckland College has maintained an excellent reputation for supporting parents and pupils throughout its history. We welcome raising concerns with the school and are committed to responding resolutely to any concerns or complaints raised by our parents. The school makes this policy readily available to parents on the school website, and in person through the school secretary during school hours.

Should parents require translation of the policy, the school will make every effort to facilitate the policy to our parents. Though prospective parents have access to the school's complaints procedure on the school website and upon request, it is not available for use by them.

What constitutes as a complaint?

A complaint, in our school, is defined as any expression of dissatisfaction or concern regarding any aspect of the school's policies, practices, services, or the conduct of staff or pupils. Complaints can cover a wide range of issues, including academic matters, school policies, student behaviour, safety concerns, and more.

A few key points to consider when identifying a complaint:

- **Expression of Dissatisfaction:** A complaint typically involves an expression of unhappiness, disagreement, or concern about a specific situation or experience within the school.

- **Specificity:** It should be specific and detail the nature of the issue, including relevant dates, individuals involved, and any supporting information.

- **Desire for Resolution:** A complaint is often accompanied by a desire for resolution or action to address the concern and bring about a positive change.

- **Respectful Communication**: We encourage all complaints to be communicated respectfully and in accordance with our school's communication guidelines.

Stages of the Complaint Procedure

Informal Stage (Stage 1)

Parent/carers should make an appointment to discuss their concerns with the member of staff who knows about the issue or incident. If the complaint relates to a pupil, ideally the member of staff concerned should be directly involved with the pupil, for example, class teacher or form teacher.

Most complaints/issues can be resolved informally and quickly by discussion with a member of staff concerned e.g. class teacher, subject teacher or form teacher. In most cases, the matter will be resolved straight away by these means, to the parent's satisfaction. If matters cannot be resolved to the parent's satisfaction, it may be necessary to meet with the Assistant Head Teacher or Deputy Head Teacher.

Any complaint/issue that is put in writing should be written clearly, outlining all the issues and include what it is hoped that the preferred outcome should be. All written complaints received will be acknowledged in writing within 7 working days.

Should the matter not be resolved within the time period, or in the event that the class teacher, subject teacher or form teacher concerned and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, the parent/s will be advised to proceed with their complaint to Stage 2 of the school's complaints procedures and policy.

Formal Stage (Stage 2)

If a parent/carer is still dissatisfied after the informal stage, they, or the member of staff can refer the matter to the Headteacher. This can be done in writing, as this will often make the situation clear to all involved parties.
The Headteacher will offer a meeting with the parent/carer or other complainant at a mutually convenient time.

At the meeting, and through discussion, the Headteacher will clarify what the issues are. The hopes of what the parent/carer is trying to achieve will also be discussed.
Together all parties will agree an acceptable outcome. This should be to the satisfaction of all parties involved. These should be written down and agreed by all parties, so there is no misunderstanding. Parents/carers should be given a copy of this.

If the issue is complex, the Headteacher may need to speak to other staff and pupils to investigate the concerns.

This should happen within 10 working days. If this timescale cannot be met, the Headteacher should inform the parent/carer that this will take longer, explain the reasons for this and give a timescale for when the investigation will be completed.
After meeting with the Headteacher, if the complaint is still not resolved to the parent/carer's satisfaction, the complaint can be referred to the Directors at Stage 3 of the school's complaints procedures and policy.

This can either be in writing to the school address, or alternatively the school can ask the Directors to contact the parent/carer directly. The Headteacher can also refer the complaint to the Directors.

If the Headteacher is the subject of the complaint, the complaint should go straight to the Directors and miss out Stage 2. The Directors may ask for the complaint to be put in writing (if this has not already happened).

Directors Response (Stage 3)

The designated Director has 20-25 working days to investigate the complaint, summarise and write their conclusions to parents. If the complaint cannot be resolved within this time, the Director will inform the complainant and explain why it is taking longer. Reasons for this may be that the complaint is complex and needs more time, or someone involved is absent through sickness or holidays. The Director will, in this event, give a realistic timescale for when the complaint should be resolved.

Should the Director(s) feel that it is necessary, they can set up a Complaint Committee to consider the complaint. The Director(s) will decide if this is appropriate. If the Director(s) can resolve the complaint, there is no need to hold a Complaint Committee meeting. As far as possible, it is recommended that a Complaint Committee is a last resort.

The Directors can appoint an investigating officer to gather evidence and conduct preliminary interviews on the school's behalf. The investigating officer will provide a detailed report of their investigation of the complaint and parents/carers should be given a copy of this report. It is important that the investigating officer is seen as impartial. So, if the investigating officer is another Director, they cannot be a member of the associated Complaint Committee.

The Complaints Committee will consist of three people, at least one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the school. The panel will not include the Headteacher if they are the subject of the complaint.

The Complaint Committee should meet at a time convenient to all parties. The complainant, the Headteacher, the Directors, and any member of staff the complaint is about will be invited to the meeting. Any person invited can bring a friend or supporter if they wish. The Complaint Committee will consider any written material, and also give the person making the complaint, the Headteacher, Directors, and staff an opportunity to state their case and to question others present.

The committee will ensure that all present are treated fairly. The meeting will be minuted and everyone present will be given a copy of the minutes.

The committee/Director(s) will give their decision, in writing, within 20-25 working days after the meeting, along with the reasons for their decision. **The decision at stage 3 is final**.

Timeframe for dealing with complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within clear and reasonable timescales. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible; the school's target is to complete the first 2 stages of the procedure within 25 working days. For Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, the aim will be that this is completed within a further 20-25 working days.

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, 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.

It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to School life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence; however, deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only be entertained on an exceptional basis, and the school will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay. If there is a delay, the Director or Headteacher will inform the complainant what caused the delay and the number of days they should expect to wait.

Complaints from General Public

If a complaint is not from a parent/carer of a pupil of the school (an example being a member of the public) these should be made directly to the Headteacher, preferably in writing; they do not have access to the school's complaints procedures. The Headteacher will respond to complaints from the general public as appropriate.

Persistent Correspondence

Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this may be regarded by the school as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

Recording Complaints and use of personal data

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all formal complaints (i.e. those that proceed to Stage 2 and beyond) and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).
These will be kept for seven years. The school processes data in accordance with its Data Protection Policy. When dealing with complaints, the school (including any Committee member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)

- Name and contact details of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/minutes of the hearing
- The Committee's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Data Protection Policy, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.

The school will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Committee hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Data Protection 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.

It should be noted that schools do not need to consider complaints made more than one year after the incident/situation. If a complaint is made about an issue that is over a year old, the school will write to the complainant explaining why this is the case.

Number of Formal School Complaints Academic Year 2025/2026: 9