

Complaints Policy



Sutton Grammar School

Who can make a complaint?

This Complaints Policy is a requirement of Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. It only applies to complaints from parents/carers of students at the School or students if over the age of 18. Throughout the text the word parent includes students over the age of 18.

Unless complaints are dealt with under separate statutory procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions) the School will use this complaints procedure.

Complaints from people who are not parents of students at the School will be handled respectfully and expediently. Complaints, marked private and confidential, should be addressed to the Headmaster or Company Secretary via the School Office.

The difference between a concern and a complaint

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Sutton Grammar School takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases, the Headmaster or other member of the Senior Leadership Team, will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headmaster or other member of the Senior Leadership Team will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when parents would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Sutton Grammar School will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf of a parent, or student, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headmaster) should be made in the first instance, to the Headmaster via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headmaster should be addressed to the Chair of the Trust, via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints about the Chair of the Trust, any individual trustee or the whole Trust Board should be addressed to the Company Secretary at clerk@stongrammar.sutton.sch.uk or in writing via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

For ease of use, a template complaint form is included at the end of this procedure. If you require help in completing the form, please contact the school office. You can also ask a third-party organisation for example like the Citizens Advice to help you.

In accordance with equality law, we will consider making reasonable adjustments if required, to enable parents to access and complete this complaints procedure, for instance providing information in alternative formats, assisting parents in raising a formal complaint or holding meetings in accessible locations.

Anonymous complaints

We will not normally investigate anonymous complaints. However, the Headmaster or the Trust Chairman, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

Scope of this complaints procedure

This procedure covers all complaints by parents except those dealt with by a statutory process.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Admissions 	<p>Appeals for a place at the School are determined by an independent appeals committee. Unsuccessful applicants will be advised of the process.</p> <p>Admission to the School in years 7-11 is managed through the coordinated Greater London and Surrey admissions scheme and the Sutton LA. If you have concerns about the process contact your local authority.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exclusion of students from the School 	<p>Parents of an excluded student will be informed in the Headmaster's letter of the appeal process.</p> <p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>Complaints about the application of the Behaviour Policy can be made through the Complaints Procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whistleblowing 	<p>The Trust has a whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff, volunteers and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistle-blowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with the Trust. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff grievances 	<p>Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the Trust's Grievance Procedure.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the Trust's Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, if appropriate.</p> <p>Parents will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the parent will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within

this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations. If this happens, we will inform you of a proposed new timescale.

If a parent commences legal action against Sutton Grammar School in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Sutton Grammar School wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a complaint

If a parent wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Stage 1 – Informal complaints

It is to be hoped that most concerns can be expressed and resolved on an informal basis.

Concerns should be raised with the class teacher, or year head / subject head or Headmaster. Parents should not approach individual Trustees to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints at Stage 3 of the procedure.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the appropriate person investigating the complaint will provide an informal written response, or make a response in a telephone conversation, within five school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the issue remains unresolved, the next step is to make a formal complaint.

Stage 2 – Formal complaints

Formal complaints must be made to the Headmaster (unless they are about the Headmaster), via the school office. This may be done in person or in writing (preferably on the Complaint Form).

The Headmaster will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

Within this response, the Headmaster will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the parent would like to see. The Headmaster can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headmaster may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headmaster (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headmaster will provide a formal written response within fifteen school days of the date of receipt of the complaint.

If the Headmaster is unable to meet this deadline, he will provide the parent with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Sutton Grammar School will take to resolve the complaint.

The Headmaster will advise the parent of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 2.

If the complaint is about the Headmaster, a suitably skilled member of the Trust Board will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 2.

Complaints about the Headmaster or a member of the Trust Board must be made to the Company Secretary, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair
- the entire Board
- the majority of the Board

Stage 2 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the Company Secretary. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the parent is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 2 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 3 – a panel hearing consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint with one panel member who is independent of the management and running of the school. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 3 must be made to the Company Secretary via the school office, within ten school days of receipt of the Stage 2 response.

The Company Secretary will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within five school days.

Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Company Secretary will write to the parent to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Company Secretary will provide an anticipated date and keep the parent informed.

If the parent rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Company Secretary will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the parent's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

If the complaint is:

- about the Chair
- the entire Board or
- the majority of the Board

Stage 3 will be heard by a completely independent committee panel.

A parent may bring someone along to the panel meeting to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Parents will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with parents.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least ten school days before the meeting, the Clerk to the Committee will:

- confirm and notify the parent of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the parent is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least five school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least three school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a parent's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the parent and Sutton Grammar School Trust with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within five school days.

The letter to the parent will include details of how to contact the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Sutton Grammar School.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Sutton Grammar School will take to resolve the complaint.

The panel will ensure that those findings and recommendations are sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parent and, where relevant, the person complained about. Furthermore, they will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the headteacher.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing, along with what actions have been taken, regardless of the decision.

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.

Next Steps

If the parent believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the ESFA after they have completed Stage 3.

The ESFA will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Sutton Grammar School. They will consider whether Sutton Grammar School has adhered

to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint and whether they have followed [Part 7 of the Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

The parent can refer their complaint to the ESFA online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Academy Complaints and Customer Insight Unit
Education and Skills Funding Agency
Cheylesmore House
5 Quinton Road
COVENTRY
CV1 2WT

Date from: September 2022

Review Date: December 2025

Complaint Form

Please complete and return to the headteacher who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Student's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the student (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number: Email address:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the School about it.

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Action taken:

Date:

Roles and Responsibilities

Parent

The parent will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect
- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the parent to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and student and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the parent and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the parent feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the Headmaster or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.
- The Headmaster or Complaints Committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the parent, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the parent is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, Headmaster, Board Chair or the Company Secretary and to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:
 - sharing third party information
 - additional support. This may be needed by parents when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the parent is a child or young person
- keep records.

Company Secretary/Clerk to the Complaints Committee

The Company Secretary or the Clerk is the contact point for the parent and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example: stage 1 paperwork, school and parent submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
- the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
- parents who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the parent is a child/young person

- the remit of the committee is explained to the parent
- written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.

If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting

- both the parent and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself
- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No Board Member may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the parent

We recognise that the parent might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

Conduct of Meeting

Committee members should bear in mind:

- many parents will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting.
- Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.
- extra care needs to be taken when a student is present with the parent.
- The committee should respect the views of the students and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
- The parent should be advised that agreement for a student to attend might not always be possible if the committee considers that is not in the student's interest to attend the whole or part of the meeting.
- the welfare of the student is paramount.