



Exeter Pre-Prep School

Parental Complaints Policy

Status:	Approved
Source (author):	MCMM
Last review date:	August 2026
Next review date:	August 2027

1. Introduction

Exeter Pre-Prep School ("the school") has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school with care and in accordance with this Complaints Policy.

The school's Complaints Policy is available to parents of current and prospective pupils on the school's website. Where requested, the school will inform parents that the policy is published, explain the format in which it is available, and provide the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year. In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the school will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), a copy of this Complaints Policy together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

1.1. Who may use this Policy

This Policy is for use by parents of current pupils at the school.

Although this Policy is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them. Parents of prospective pupils who are concerned about any aspect of the admissions process should contact the Admissions Office in the first instance.

Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Policy only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to whom the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the school. The only exception is where the complaint is a review of a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of a pupil under clauses 8.10 or 8.12 of the school's Terms and Conditions, in which case such a review must be requested no later than five working days from the receipt of the Head's letter informing the parents of the decision to exclude or require the removal of the pupil.

Complaints relating to a decision to exclude or require the removal of a pupil will be considered under Stage 3 of this Policy only.

"Parent(s)" means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for the current pupil about whom the complaint relates.

1.2. Equality and reasonable adjustments

The school will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the application of this Policy, both in the manner in which the process is run and in the substantive decisions taken under it.

The school will make reasonable adjustments for parents with disabilities and will make appropriate arrangements for parents with language needs, including translation or interpreting where reasonable, so that they are able to access this Policy. Parents who require an adjustment should tell the Clerk to the Governors or the Head's Office as early as possible, and in any event in advance of any meeting or hearing.

1.3. What the school is able to share

Although the school endeavours to manage complaints in an open and transparent manner, parents should be aware that there may be circumstances which mean the school is unable to share complete details about how a complaint has been handled by the school, the evidence collated, the steps taken

in response or other related matters. This could be the case even when a complaint is upheld. For example, the information may constitute sensitive third-party data (belonging, for instance, to a member of staff, a pupil or another parent), legal or regulatory requirements may prohibit disclosure, or withholding the information may be in accordance with specific instructions from a statutory agency. This list is not exhaustive.

2. What constitutes a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the school as a whole, about a specific part of the school or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the school is within the scope of this Policy. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the school has done something wrong, has failed to do something that it should have done, or has acted unfairly.

Many matters are resolved quickly by a conversation with the right member of staff, and parents are encouraged to raise anything that is troubling them early and informally. Stage 1 of this Policy exists for that purpose. Parents are not obliged to describe a matter as a concern rather than a complaint, and the school will not treat a matter as falling outside this Policy because of the label given to it.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The school is here for your child, and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.

2.1. Matters which are dealt with under other procedures

Some matters have their own procedure, which is usually the quicker and more appropriate route to a resolution. The table below is a guide to where such matters are dealt with. Listing a matter here does not put it outside this Policy. Where the school considers that another route is the more appropriate one, it will explain this to the parents in writing.

Matter	Where it is dealt with
Safeguarding and child protection concerns	Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy (see section 3 below)
Concerns or allegations about the conduct of a member of staff towards a child	Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy, in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education (see section 3 below)
Exclusion or required removal of a pupil	Terms and Conditions and Permanent Exclusion Policy; any appeal is dealt with under Stage 3 of this Policy only
Fees, fee remission and debt recovery	Terms and Conditions
Special educational needs, disabilities and access arrangements	Learning Support Policy and associated examination policies
Requests for copies of personal data (subject access requests)	Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy (see also section 4 below)

3. Complaints which raise safeguarding concerns

If a complaint, or any information which comes to light in the course of a complaint, suggests that a child has suffered, or is at risk of suffering, harm, the matter will be referred immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and will be dealt with under the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Where a concern or allegation relates to the conduct of a member of staff, a supply teacher, a volunteer or a contractor towards a child, it will be referred to the Head or, where it concerns the Head, to the Chair of Governors, and, where appropriate, to the Local Authority Designated Officer, in accordance with Keeping Children Safe in Education. Concerns which do not meet the harm threshold will be handled under the school's arrangements for low-level concerns as set out in Appendix 4 of the safeguarding and child protection policy.

Safeguarding matters will not be delayed by, or made conditional upon, this Complaints Policy. Where a safeguarding referral is made, or where a statutory agency, the police or the Local Authority Designated Officer becomes involved, the school may need to pause all or part of this Complaints Policy. The school will tell the parents that it has done so and, so far as it is able, why. The timescales set out in this Policy will not apply for the duration of any such pause.

Nothing in this Policy prevents any person from reporting a safeguarding concern directly to the Designated Safeguarding Lead at any time.

4. Complaints which raise data protection issues

Where a complaint includes, or consists of, a concern about the way in which the school has handled personal data, the school will normally deal with that element as part of this Complaints Policy. In those circumstances the school will acknowledge the data protection element of the complaint within five working days of receiving it and will respond to it without undue delay and within one month in accordance with its obligations under data protection law.

Parents may also raise a data protection concern separately with the school's Data Protection Lead at compliance@exeterschool.org.uk and have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner's Office. Parents who use either of those routes may also make a complaint under this Policy. The school will not require parents to use one route in place of the other.

5. Confidentiality and records of meetings

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to 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. There may also be other circumstances in which the school is required to share information relating to a concern or a complaint in order to comply with its legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligations.

Parents, and others who take part in a complaint, should understand that the school is not able to give assurances of anonymity or of absolute confidentiality. Information will be shared, internally and externally, on a "need to know" basis. That will include sharing information with anyone criticised in a complaint, so that they have a fair opportunity to understand the criticism and respond to it, and with the decision-taker at each stage.

Written records will be kept of all formal meetings, interviews and hearings held under this Policy. Such records will not be verbatim, but are intended to be an accurate reflection of what was discussed.

Meetings and hearings held under this Policy may not be recorded by any party without the prior written agreement of everyone present. Covert recording is not permitted. Where a parent requires a recording, or any other adjustment, in connection with a disability, the school will consider that request as a reasonable adjustment.

6. The Three-Stage Complaints Policy

6.1. Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.

If parents have a complaint, they should normally contact their child's Class Teacher. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Class Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult the Head or a member of the leadership team. Where the complaint concerns the Class Teacher themselves, parents should contact the Head directly.

Complaints made directly to another member of staff will usually be referred to the relevant Class Teacher, unless the member of staff receiving the complaint considers it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.

The member of staff dealing with the matter 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 five working days, or in the event that the member of staff and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Complaints Policy.

If the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors, through the Clerk to the Governors, by email to clerk@exeterschool.org.uk or by telephone on 01392 307080.

6.2. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head. Parents are encouraged to use the Complaint Form appended to this Policy, which helps to ensure that the school has the information it needs, but a complaint made in writing in any form will be accepted.

The Head may require further information from the parents to help clarify the scope and nature of their concerns.

In some circumstances the Head may deem it appropriate to nominate a member of staff to hear the complaint and to manage the Stage 2 process. Where a nominee is appointed, the school will ensure that the person appointed has not been materially involved in the matters that are the subject of the complaint, and that they are more senior than the member of staff who dealt with the matter at Stage 1 and, where the complaint concerns a member of staff, more senior than that member of staff. The Head (or their nominee) will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases the Head (or their nominee) will meet or speak to the parents concerned within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out. The Head (or their nominee) will determine who should carry out any investigation, and this may be someone external to the school.

Once the Head (or their nominee) is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head (or their nominee) will also give reasons for their decision. In most cases the Head (or their nominee) will make their decision and provide the parents with reasons within 20 working days of the complaint being put in writing or, where clarification has been requested, within 20 working days of that clarification being provided.

Where the complaint is against the Head

If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors, through the Clerk to the Governors. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed as if references to the Head (or their nominee) were references to the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors to determine the complaint. The Chair of Governors will not determine the complaint personally, so that they remain able to appoint a Panel under Stage 3 and to be consulted as necessary.

Where the complaint is against a Governor

If the complaint is against a Governor, it should be made to the Chair of Governors, through the Clerk to the Governors. If the complaint is against the Chair of Governors, it should be made to the Vice-Chair of Governors, through the Clerk. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed by the Chair or Vice-Chair, or by a Governor nominated by them who has not been involved in the matters complained of.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Policy.

For parents with children in Nursery and Reception (Early Years Foundation Stage) there are additional regulatory requirements and information is provided below under the heading EYFS.

6.3. Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should do so in writing to the Clerk to the Governors, who acts as convenor and clerk to the Panel, within five working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence on which the parents wish to rely should be provided with their grounds of appeal. Parents are not required to raise new grounds in order to proceed to Stage 3.

Where parents are unable to provide their grounds of appeal within the time period stipulated because of extenuating circumstances which have impeded them from taking action, they should request an extension in writing. Such a request should be made to the Clerk to the Governors in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for it, and will be considered on its merits. In the event that the parents do not provide their grounds of appeal within the time period stipulated (including any extension agreed), the school reserves the right, after due consideration, to conclude the complaint process and not to progress the matter to Stage 3.

The Clerk to the Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel, will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be

independent of the management and running of the school. The Panel will be appointed by the Chair of Governors, who will appoint one Panel member to act as Chair of the Panel. Panel members will declare any conflict of interest before their appointment is confirmed, and any person with a material connection to the complaint or to the parties will not sit.

The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will acknowledge the complaint within five working days and will schedule a hearing to take place within 20 working days (seven working days in the case of any appeal against a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of a pupil under clause 8.10 or 8.12 of the school's Terms and Conditions).

If the Panel or the Clerk to the Governors deems it necessary, they may require that further particulars of the complaint or of any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing, or that further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later than five working days prior to the hearing.

The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. The Stage 2 decision-taker shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate. The companion may not speak on behalf of the parents or address the Panel directly. The identity of the companion should be confirmed to the Clerk to the Governors as soon as possible and by no later than two working days before the hearing.

If a parent does not exercise the right to attend the hearing, this does not remove the school's obligation to hold the hearing in accordance with this Policy. The school will make reasonable arrangements to facilitate the parents' attendance.

The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.

A note-taker will attend the hearing to take a note. This will not be a verbatim note, but an accurate reflection of what was discussed. Notes of the hearing will be shared with attendees as soon as practicable after the hearing and, where possible, before the Panel's decision is issued. To the extent that there is any disagreement about the content of those notes, or any further comments from the parties, these will be considered by and, where possible, resolved by the Chair of the Panel. A copy of any comments on the notes will be appended to the notes.

The remit of the Panel and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.

If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.

The Panel will consider whether:

- the facts of the case are proven on the balance of probabilities, and
- a fair procedure was adopted when investigating the facts of the matter, and
- the decision was reasonable and proportionate.

After due consideration of the merits of the complaint and all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to:

- dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;

- uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
- make recommendations for the school to consider.

The Panel cannot require that any financial compensation is paid to parents or otherwise obligate the school to take particular steps.

The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it within five working days of the hearing (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final.

A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents and, where relevant, to the person complained about, as well as to the Chair of Governors and the Stage 2 decision-taker. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the Proprietor (the Board of Governors) and the Head.

Appeals against exclusion or required removal

Any appeal against a decision taken by the Head to exclude or require the removal of a pupil under clause 8.10 or 8.12 of the school's Terms and Conditions will be governed by this Stage 3 of the school's Complaints Policy. A pupil who is out of school loses education while an appeal is pending, so the school will conclude such appeals as quickly as is reasonably practicable.

In such circumstances, the Panel may uphold the complaint and ask the Head to reconsider the decision if it considers, having regard to the process followed by the Head, that the decision to exclude or require the removal of the pupil was not a reasonable decision for the Head to have taken. The Panel does not have the power to require the reinstatement of a pupil.

7. 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 two stages of this Policy within 25 working days. Stage 3 will be completed within a further 30 working days of the school receiving the parents' written request to proceed to Stage 3.

Stage	Step	Timescale (working days)
Stage 1	Informal resolution by the member of staff dealing with the matter	Within 5 days of the complaint being raised
Stage 2	Meeting or discussion with the Head (or their nominee)	Within 5 days of receipt of the written complaint
Stage 2	Written decision, with reasons	Within 20 days of receipt of the written complaint; or, where clarification has been requested, within 20 working days of that clarification being provided.
Stage 3	Parents' written request to proceed, with grounds of appeal	Within 5 days of receipt of the Stage 2 decision

Stage	Step	Timescale (working days)
Stage 3	Acknowledgement by the Clerk to the Governors	Within 5 days of the request
Stage 3	Panel hearing	Within 20 days of the request (7 days for an appeal against exclusion or required removal)
Stage 3	Written decision of the Panel, with reasons	Within 5 days of the hearing

Please note that, for the purposes of this Policy, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. 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 occur only on an exceptional basis, and the school will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay and will explain the reason for it.

The timescales in this Policy do not apply for any period during which the complaint process is paused for the safeguarding reasons described above.

The school expects parents to engage in the process in a reasonable, constructive and responsive manner, to help ensure that matters can be dealt with in a timely way and in line with the targets set out in this Policy.

8. 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 Policy.

The school has a duty to protect its staff from unacceptable behaviour, including harassment, by third parties. Parents raising a complaint may be worried or upset, and the school does not regard forcefully expressed dissatisfaction as unreasonable behaviour. Where, however, a parent's conduct in the course of a complaint is abusive, threatening or discriminatory, or is so persistent as to cause a significant level of disruption to the work of the school, the school will normally:

- raise the concern with the parent informally in the first instance;
- if the behaviour continues, write to the parent explaining that the behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it; and
- if it continues further, put in place a communication plan specifying the methods and frequency of contact and a single point of contact at the school, which will be reviewed after six months.

A complaint that is already in progress will still be determined under this Policy. Parents' attention is drawn to the Parent Code of Conduct and the school's Terms and Conditions.

9. Recording complaints and use of personal data

Following resolution of a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all complaints, whether they are resolved at Stage 1 (the informal stage), at Stage 2 (the formal stage) or proceed to a Panel hearing at Stage 3, together with any action taken by the school as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld). A record will also be kept of any complaint which is withdrawn.

The school processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice, which is available on the school's website. When dealing with complaints, the school (including any Panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- any completed Complaint Form;
- the date on which the issue was raised;
- the name of the parent(s) and of the pupil(s);
- a description of the issue;
- records of all investigations (if appropriate);
- pupil records (as appropriate);
- witness statements (if appropriate);
- the name and contact details of the member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage;
- copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of telephone conversations);
- notes or minutes of meetings, including the Panel hearing; and
- the Panel's written decision.

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

All records relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to circumstances in which access is requested by the Secretary of State or by a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, there may be other circumstances in which disclosure of the substance of a complaint, or of particular confidential records relating to it, is required, for example where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (such as responding to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

Records will be retained in accordance with the school's Retention of Records Guidelines. Complaints with no safeguarding implications will be retained for a minimum of seven years. Where there are safeguarding implications, records will be retained at least until the person concerned has reached normal pension age, or for ten years from the date of the allegation if longer. Where litigation has begun or is in contemplation, all relevant records will be preserved.

10. Learning from complaints

The school will consider whether any complaint indicates a wider or systemic issue with its policies, processes or provision, and whether any action is needed beyond the resolution of the individual complaint.

A Governor from the Welfare and Safeguarding Committee inspects the complaints log for the Senior, Junior and Pre-Prep schools on a termly basis. A summary of the complaints received, together with any themes or trends identified and the actions taken as a result, will be reported to the Board of Governors, also on a termly basis.

11. Number of complaints

For the academic year 2025/26, the school received no formal complaints registered under the formal procedure (Stage 2 and Stage 3 of this Policy).

12. Complaining to the Inspectorate (ISI)

The school is inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), an independent organisation which reports to the government on schools. Parents may contact ISI if they have a concern or complaint. ISI will usually expect parents to have followed and exhausted the school's formal Complaints Policy before contacting them.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA

Telephone 020 7600 0100

e-mail: concerns@isi.net

13. EYFS

Parents of EYFS children should follow the three stages of this Complaints Policy. If parents remain dissatisfied and their complaint is about the school's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements, then parents may take their complaint to the ISI or Ofsted. Parents will be notified by ISI or Ofsted of the outcome of the investigation into their complaint within 28 days of the complaint being received.

The school will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Retention of Records Guidelines.

Parents may complain directly to Ofsted or to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements. Schools must make available details of how to contact Ofsted and/ or the ISI:

Ofsted

Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

Telephone: 0300 123 1231

email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

14. Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)

Under the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015, where a complaint has been through all of the stages of this Policy and remains unresolved, the school will write to the parents providing the name and address of an alternative dispute resolution provider certified by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute as competent to resolve consumer disputes, and will tell the parents whether the school is prepared to use that provider. The school is not obliged to enter into alternative dispute resolution.

Exeter Pre-Prep School – Complaint Form

Please read the school's Parental Complaints Policy before completing this form. It explains when and how this form should be used. Parents are encouraged to use this form at Stage 2, but a complaint made in writing in any form will be accepted.

This form should be completed by a person with parental responsibility¹ for a current pupil and returned to the Head at preprephead@exeterschool.org.uk or, if the complaint is against the Head, to the Chair of Governors through the Clerk to the Governors at clerk@exeterschool.org.uk.

Your name(s)	
Name of pupil(s), year(s) and your relationship to them	
Contact address	
Contact telephone day	
Contact telephone mobile	
Contact email address	
Details of the complaint²	

¹ Parental responsibility is defined in the Children Act 1989 as "*all rights, duties, powers and responsibilities and authority which by law **a parent** of a child has in relation to the child and his or her property*". It equates to legal responsibility for the child. If you have any doubts about whether you do or do not have parental responsibility for the child you may wish to seek legal advice.

² Please provide details of the nature of your complaint. If you have more than one ground of complaint we suggest numbering them so that each is considered in turn. If you require more space you may wish to attach an additional page setting out your complaint.

Action taken to date (including staff member(s) who has/have dealt with it so far) and solutions offered:

The reason(s) that this was not a satisfactory resolution for you

What action(s) would you like to be taken to resolve your complaint?

Do you require any adjustment in order to take part in this process (for example in connection with a disability, or a language need)?

Signature(s):

Date:

School use only
Date received:
Received by:
Stage in the Complaints Policy: Stage 1 ☐ Stage 2 ☐ Stage 3 ☐
Date acknowledgement sent and by whom:
Complaint referred to:
Safeguarding or data protection issues identified? If yes, action taken:
Action taken:
Date:

The school will process the personal data provided on this form in accordance with section 9 of the Parental Complaints Policy, the school's Privacy Notice and its Data Protection Policy.