



Complaints Policy

Reviewed by:	Andrew Patterson, Compliance Manager
Date:	1 September 2024
Last reviewed on:	1 May 2024
Next review due by:	31 August 2025
Version control:	4
Approved by:	Henrietta Jordan, Schools Director

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Introduction

Melrose Education and its subsidiaries believe that parents and professional partners are entitled to expect courtesy and prompt, careful attention to their individual needs and wishes. We hope that everyone is happy with the service provided and we encourage them to voice their appreciation to the staff concerned.

We welcome any suggestions from parents and our professional partners on how we can improve our services and will give prompt attention to any concerns they may have. Any concerns will be dealt with professionally and timely to ensure that any issues arising from them are handled effectively and to ensure the welfare of all learners, enable ongoing co-operative partnership with parents, and to continually improve the quality of our schools. **Information** will be displayed on our websites, informing parents and professional partners of how they can share compliments, concerns, and complaints.

Melrose Education and its subsidiaries pride itself on the quality of support, teaching, and pastoral care provided to its young people. However, if parents or our professional partners do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the school in accordance with the procedure detailed below.

This policy outlines our formal procedure for dealing with complaints where we are not able to resolve a concern.

When responding to written complaints, we aim to:

- Be impartial and non-adversarial.
- Facilitate a full and fair investigation by the school, a nominated member of the Melrose senior team, or an independent person or panel, where necessary.
- Address all the points raised and provide a response in a reasonable timeframe.
- Respect complainants' desire for confidentiality and expect the same from parents and/or professional partners.
- All parties treat each other with respect and courtesy.
- Ensure that any decisions we make are reasonable, fair, and proportionate and adhere to the independent schools' standards and employment legislation.
- Keep complainants informed of the progress of the complaints process, as appropriate.
- Consider how the complaint can contribute to any school improvement evaluation processes.

The school makes its Complaints Policy available on its website, or a copy will be provided on request.

Legislation and Statutory Guidance

This document meets the requirements set out in part 7 of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, which states that we must have, and make available, a written procedure to deal with complaints from parents of learners at the school.

It also refers to good practice guidance on setting up complaints procedures from the Department of Education (DfE).

Definitions and Scope

Definitions

The DfE guidance explains the difference between a concern and a complaint:

- A **concern** is defined as “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought.” The school will resolve concerns through day-to-day communication, as far as possible.
- A **complaint** is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about action taken or a lack of action.”

Scope

This policy applies to complaints from parents of children registered at our schools. All other complaints will be dealt with as an informal complaint only. The school will try to resolve concerns informally where possible. There may be occasions when complainants would like to raise their concerns formally and make a written complaint. This policy outlines the procedure relating to handling such concerns or complaints.

Throughout the process, we will be sensitive to the needs of all parties involved, and make any reasonable adjustments needed to accommodate individuals. This process is strictly confidential, and we would ask parents to allow us the time to fully investigate any concerns or complaints in a fair, and impartial manner.

Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All written concerns and complaints will be acknowledged, by email, within 5 working days if received during term-time (the definition of a working day is “a day when the school provides education to learners”). It is in everyone’s interest to resolve a concern or complaint as speedily as possible. Where the above timescales have to be exceeded, there will be further communication with the complainant to explain the delay and set a new deadline.

Our aim is to complete this process for any written concerns (Informal Stage) within 28 working days if the concern is lodged during term-time.

For a written complaint, (Formal Stage 1), our aim is to complete this process within 28 working days if the complaint is lodged during term-time.

For an appeal against a written complaint, (Formal Stage 2) our aim is to complete this process within a further 28 working days, if the appeal is lodged during term-time.

Recording Concerns and Complaints

Following resolution of a concern or a complaint, the school will keep a written record of all written concerns and complaints and whether they were resolved, at what stage of the procedure and what action was taken as a result.

Correspondence, statements, and records relating to individual concerns or complaints will be kept confidential except to the extent required by Ofsted/ISA, i.e., the school will provide Ofsted/ISA, on request, with a written record of all concerns and complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken. The records will be kept for at least 3 years, and we will publish the number of complaints on our website.

Confidentiality - all information in respect of concerns or complaints will be treated confidentially and only those who are required to enable a satisfactory resolution to be achieved will have access to it. It will be subject to our usual confidentiality policies and procedures and details will not be divulged to anyone other than those required for a satisfactory conclusion of the matter, without the permission of the person expressing the concern or complaint. We also require parents to maintain confidentiality at all times.

All personal data is held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Investigations into complaints will be recorded on the Complaints Chronology Form.

Special Circumstances

Any concern or complaint or other notice that suggests that a child has been at risk of significant harm through violence, emotional abuse, sexual interference, or neglect may be referred without further notice to Children's Social Care and/or to the social services authority for the area in which the child lives. If a social services authority decides to investigate a situation this may postpone or supersede investigation by the school.

Stages of Concerns and Complaints

Stage 1 - Informal

- It is hoped that most concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parent/s have a concern, they should contact the School Office Manager or the School Principal. In many cases, the matter will be resolved to the satisfaction of the parent/s. If the School Office Manager or School Principal cannot resolve the matter, it may be necessary for them to consult with the Compliance Manager. The Compliance Manager is a member of the Melrose Education SMT.
- Concerns made directly from a referring agency, will usually be referred to the School Principal.
- The School Principal will make a written record of all concerns and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within 28 working days during term-time or, if the School Office Manager or School Principal and the parent/s fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the parent/s will be advised to proceed with their concern in accordance with Stage 2 of this procedure (Formal Stage).
- If the concern is against the School Principal, parent/s should make their complaint directly to the Compliance Manager. The Compliance Manager will investigate the concern in accordance with this policy.

If you feel that the concern is not resolved, you must notify the school or the Compliance Manager, within 5 working days during term-time, in writing of your intention to move to the next stage (Formal Stage 2).

Stage 2 - Formal

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis (Stage 1, concern), then the parent/s should put their complaint in writing to the Compliance

Manager. The parent/s should obtain the Formal Complaints Form from the School Principal or School Office, and complete and submit it to the Compliance Manager using the complaints@melroseeducation.com.

- The Compliance Manager will write to the parent/s concerned, normally within 14 working days of receiving the complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for the School Principal and/or Compliance Manager to carry out further investigations.
- The Compliance Manager will investigate the complaint as submitted in writing. Any subsequent complaints will be dealt with as a separate complaint when the original complaint has been concluded.
- The Compliance Manager will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint – all meetings will be minuted.
- Once the Compliance Manager is satisfied that, as far as is practicable, all the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made, and parent/s will be informed of this decision in writing. The Compliance Manager will also give reasons for the decision.
- The Compliance Manager will complete a final report using the Complaints Investigation Outcome Report and Guidance documentation.
- If parent/s are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3.
- Multiple complaints may be treated as vexatious – please see our policy on Vexatious Complaints for more information.

If you feel that the complaint is not resolved, you must notify the school within 5 working days during term time, in writing of your intention to move to the next stage (Formal Stage 3).

Stage 3 – Formal - Panel Hearing

- If parent/s seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), a complaints panel will be appointed, chaired by the Schools Director.
- The matter will be referred 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 complaint will be acknowledged, and a hearing scheduled to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 working days during term time.
- The Chair of the Complaints Panel reserves the right to appoint the additional members, as necessary.
- If the Complaints Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Where possible and appropriate, copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties normally not later than 5 working days during term time, prior to the hearing.
- The parent/s will be invited to attend the meeting and may be accompanied by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation is not appropriate. The meeting may be a virtual meeting or held face-to-face and the format will be determined by the Chair of the Complaints Panel. The meeting cannot be recorded by any party.

- If possible, the Complaints Panel will resolve the complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- The Chair of the Complaints Panel will appoint a suitable minute taker.
- 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. The Panel will write to the parent/s informing them of its decision and the reasons for it within a further 14 working days during term time.
- The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parent/s, the School Principal, and, where relevant, the person who is the subject of the complaint.
- The Panel's findings and recommendations will also be available to the Proprietor representatives.
- Parent/s can be assured that all complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements, and records will be kept confidential except where it is required of the school by paragraph 7 of the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2014, where disclosure is required during the school's inspection or where any other legal obligation prevails.
- We reserve the right to share any information deemed necessary with the relevant local authority.

This is the final stage of the complaints process.

Monitoring Arrangements

An appointed person will monitor the effectiveness of the concerns and complaints procedure in ensuring that complaints are handled properly. They will review the number and nature of complaints and review underlying issues on a regular basis.

Email Communications

All communications should be via the complaints@melroseeducation.com.