# Complaints Policy

**More Than Ed** | Independent School

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## 1. Principles

More Than Ed Independent School (MTE) aims to provide an outstanding education for all students. Our senior leaders, learning managers, teaching staff and therapeutic staff work hard to build positive relationships with students, parents and carers, employers and commissioners. Even so, we recognise that there may be occasions when a parent, carer or other party wishes to raise a concern or make a complaint. This policy sets out how we handle complaints fairly, openly and as quickly as possible, always putting the interests of the student first.

In the first instance, we encourage anyone with a concern about a learner's education or about the school to speak to the student's Learning Manager, in person or by telephone. In our experience, most matters can be resolved quickly and informally in this way.

## 2. Who Can Use This Procedure

This complaints procedure is for the parents and carers of students who are currently registered at the school. The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 require an independent school to have a procedure for handling complaints from parents of registered pupils, and it is on this basis that the formal stages of this procedure – including the right to a panel hearing – are available.

The school will always listen and respond to concerns raised by others – for example, prospective or former parents, members of the public, commissioners or employers – but those who do not have a child currently registered at the school are not entitled to use the formal staged procedure set out below.

There is one exception, which the school applies as a matter of policy rather than obligation. Where a student's placement is being ended, or has been ended, by the school, the parents and carers of that student may use this procedure in full, including the right to a panel hearing, whether or not the student is still registered here at the time the complaint is made or heard. A complaint about the ending of a placement will not be refused on the ground that the student has left. This mirrors the commitment given at section 14 of our Ending a Placement Policy and Statement.

## 3. Aims

We aim to:

- be fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint;
- give careful consideration to all complaints and deal with them as swiftly as possible;
- resolve complaints through dialogue and mutual understanding, and through investigation where necessary;
- put the interests of the student above all else; and
- provide sufficient opportunity for any complaint to be fully discussed and resolved.

All formal (Stage 2) complaints are followed by a written report outlining the actions taken and any recommendations made.

## 4. The Difference Between a Concern, a Complaint and an Appeal

A concern is an expression of worry or doubt about an issue considered important, for which reassurance is sought. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about actions taken or a lack of action. An appeal is a request for a decision to be reviewed or reversed – for example, where there is disagreement about an internal or external grade for a piece of work. An appeal follows the same staged process set out below.

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 for formal procedures, and we take all informal concerns seriously.

## 5. How to Raise a Concern or Complaint

If a parent, carer or student is concerned about anything to do with the education we provide, they should first discuss the matter with the student's tutor or Learning Manager. Most concerns can be resolved positively in this way.

If the complainant is unsure who to contact, they should contact the school office on 01302 957433 or at karen.holmes@mted.uk. If the complaint is about the Headteacher, they should contact the Managing Director, Charlotte Hopkins, at charlie.hopkins@mted.uk. Or the Deputy Headteacher at hayley.winstanley@mted.uk

Complaints should normally be raised as soon as possible after the event, and generally within three months. On request, the school will tell parents the number of formal complaints registered in the previous academic year.

## 6. Stage 1 – Informal

Most complaints can be resolved informally. The complainant should raise the matter with the relevant member of staff, the Learning Manager or, where appropriate, the Headteacher – in person, or by telephone, letter or email.

We will acknowledge an informal complaint within 5 school days and aim to investigate and respond within 15 school days. The informal stage usually involves a meeting between the complainant and the appropriate senior leader (and/or the person the complaint is about). At this stage, we will ask the complainant what they feel would resolve the matter. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, it can be escalated to a formal (Stage 2) complaint.

## 7. Stage 2 – Formal

If the complainant is not satisfied after Stage 1, they may make a formal complaint in writing, setting out the nature of the complaint and how it has been handled so far. Formal complaints can be made by letter or email, by telephone, in person, or by a third party acting on behalf of the complainant. Where a complaint is made by telephone or in person, the school records it and sends the complainant a written summary to confirm it has been correctly understood before the investigation begins. This replaces the earlier wording about a third party acting on the complainant's behalf.

The complainant should provide relevant details, such as dates, times and the names of any witnesses, together with copies of any relevant documents and what they feel would resolve the complaint. If a complainant needs help to make a formal complaint, they can contact the school office on 01302 957433 or karen.holmes@mted.uk (or, if the complaint is about the Headteacher, the Managing Director or Deputy Headteacher as above).

The Headteacher (or another senior leader appointed for this purpose – or the Managing Director or Deputy Headteacher if the complaint concerns the Headteacher) will carry out an investigation. This may include interviews with staff or others involved, and may draw on other procedures, such as the disciplinary or whistleblowing procedures. The relevant local authority may also be informed and may take part from this point.

The complainant may be accompanied to any meeting and should tell the school in advance who will accompany them. In certain circumstances (for example, a conflict of interest), the school may decline a particular companion and will notify the complainant so that alternative arrangements can be made.

The written outcome of the investigation, including any findings and recommendations, will be sent to the complainant within 10 school days. Where a multi-agency network supports the child and family, the report will be shared with the relevant professionals, with consent.

## 8. Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If the complainant remains dissatisfied after Stage 2, they may request a panel hearing. The panel will:

- consist of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint;
- include at least one person who is independent of the management and running of the school; and
- allow the complainant to attend and to be accompanied by one other person (for example, a relative, teacher or friend); legal representation is not normally appropriate.

Panel members will have no connection to the complaint. All papers and information relating to the complaint will be provided to the panel and the parties no later than 5 school days before the hearing.

A panel hearing will be convened within 20 school days of the request, and the complainant will be given at least 5 school days' notice of the date.

If possible, the panel will resolve the complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the panel will decide how this is carried out. After considering all the facts, the panel will reach a decision and may make recommendations, within 5 school days of the hearing, and will write to the complainant with its decision and the reasons for it.

A copy of the panel's findings and any recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and will be available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the Headteacher (or the Managing Director or Deputy Headteacher where the complaint concerns the Headteacher).

## 9. After the Panel

The decision of the panel is final. If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they may complain to the Secretary of State for Education, who can consider whether the school handled the complaint properly. In the case of complaints involving serious misconduct or a possible criminal offence, the matter will be referred immediately to the police.

## 10. Timescales

Complaints are considered and resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible:

- reasonable time limits are set for each action within each stage. Where further investigation is needed, new time limits are agreed, and the complainant is told of any new deadlines and given an explanation for any delay;
- excessive time limits are not considered reasonable or acceptable, except in extenuating circumstances; and
- complaints should normally be made as soon as possible after the event, and generally within three months.

## 11. Complaints About a Member of the Leadership Team

If a parent or carer has a complaint about a member of the Leadership Team, they should first request an informal meeting with that person, if appropriate, or with one of the Directors if not. If the complaint is very serious, a formal complaint should be made as set out above.

## 12. Complaints Not Covered by This Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of facilities or services that the school provides, except the following, which have their own procedures:

- Whistleblowing – the school has an internal whistleblowing procedure for employees. Concerns can also be raised directly with the Independent Schools Inspectorate, which inspects the school, with the Department for Education, or with the NSPCC whistleblowing advice line on 0800 028 0285.
- Admissions.
- Matters likely to require a child protection investigation.
- Staff grievances and disciplinary matters – handled through the school's internal procedures; complainants will not be informed of the outcome of any investigation.

## 13. Records, Monitoring and Confidentiality

A written record is kept of all formal complaints, including whether they were resolved at the formal stage or proceeded to a panel hearing, and the action taken by the school as a result (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld). The Headteacher and the Directors review the complaints log annually, and it informs staff training and development needs.

All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are 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.

## 14. Availability of This Policy

This policy is made available to all students, parents and carers so that they are properly informed about the complaints process. Students also receive a child-friendly version of the process in their induction pack.

## 15. Related Policies

This policy should be read alongside the school's other policies, including:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Relational (Behaviour) Policy
- Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices
- Staff Disciplinary and Grievance procedures
- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Ending a Placement Policy and Statement

## 16. Legislation and Guidance

In drawing up this policy, the school has had regard to the following:

- The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (Part 7: the handling of complaints)
- Education and Skills Act 2008 (section 109: inspection access to records)
- Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures (DfE)
- Data Protection Act 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)