

Sponsor	Head
Issue Date	Aug 2022
Next Review Date	Aug 2023
Governor	Chair



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

INTRODUCTION

Woldingham 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 in accordance with this Procedure. If parents have any queries or worries about their daughters they are encouraged to discuss these, in the first instance, with relevant members of staff over the telephone, by arranging a meeting at school, or during the Parent/Teacher Meetings. We recognise that the first indication of concerns may be communicated by email.

STAGE 1 – INFORMAL RESOLUTION

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

Academic issues

- Any queries or complaints relating to academic issues should be discussed, in the first instance, with the Head of Year (this includes the Head of Marden and the Head of Sixth Form). The matter may be referred to the relevant member of staff but the Head of Year will handle the query/complaint.
- In more serious cases, the Deputy Head (Academic) should be approached.
- Parents are always welcome to contact the Head directly on all matters.

Pastoral issues

- Any queries or complaints relating to pastoral issues should be discussed, in the first instance, with the Head of Year (this includes the Head of Marden and the Head of Sixth Form). The matter may be referred to the relevant member of staff but the Head of Year will handle the query/complaint.
- In more serious cases, the Senior Deputy Head should be approached.
- Parents are always welcome to contact the Head directly on all matters.

The member of staff who receives the complaint will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Complaints will be acknowledged as soon as possible, and at the latest within five working days.

The complaint will be investigated and the relevant department or member of staff will be given an opportunity to respond. Following investigation, appropriate action will be taken and this will be explained to the parents and implemented. It may also be appropriate for the member of staff to apologise to the parents.

Parents making a complaint should be aware that they cannot be guaranteed confidentiality as members of staff receiving a complaint are expected to notify the Head, wherever possible, prior to taking action. The Head will share serious complaints with the Chair of Governors. If, however, the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint direct to the Chair of Governors.

Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with **Stage 2** of this Procedure.

STAGE 2 – FORMAL RESOLUTION

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should **put their complaint in writing** to the Head. The Head will acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days. The Head will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head (or appointed representative) will meet or speak to the parents concerned to discuss the matter. This will normally be **within 5 working days** of receiving the complaint, unless, despite the best efforts of all involved, circumstances dictate that the meeting be delayed beyond this timescale. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage. If the meeting is delayed, the Head (or appointed representative) will endeavour to ensure the meeting is held **within 15** working days. During the period of the COVID pandemic, flexibility in relation to these timescales may need to be shown.
- If at this stage it is necessary for the Head to carry out further investigations, the Head (or appointed representative) may decide to delay the meeting to a reasonable extent beyond 5 working days to allow for this investigation to be completed. The parents will be advised of the changed timescale; every effort will be made to arrange a meeting within 15 working days.
- The Head (or appointed representative) will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head (or appointed representative) 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 appointed representative) will also give reasons for his/her decision.
- If the Chair of Governors is handling the complaint, he or his appointed representative will handle the complaint according to the same procedure as the Head.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision and should the matter not be resolved within four weeks they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

STAGE 3 – PANEL HEARING

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the appropriate Governor, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of at least 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. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chair of Governors. A Governor, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a full-merits hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 working days unless, despite the best efforts of all involved, circumstances such as public holidays or existing commitments of the Panel dictate that the meeting be delayed beyond this timescale.
- If a parent does not exercise the right to attend a panel hearing, this does not remove the School's obligation to hold the hearing in conformity with this complaints policy.
- If the Panel deems it necessary, it may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties not later **than 5 working days** prior to the hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- 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, which it shall complete within 14 working days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings and, if any, recommendations will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Governors and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint was made.
- The findings and recommendations will be available on the school premises for inspection by the Chair of Governors and the Head.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access to them is requested to the extent stated in Part 7, paragraph 33(k) of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, by the Secretary of State (also covered under Section 109 of the 2008 Education and Skills Act), or

where disclosure is required in the course of the School's inspection or under other legal authority.

FURTHER NOTES

- This policy is written with reference to parents of current registered pupils (i.e. those pupils on the current school roll), and parents of past pupils if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil was still registered. The policy does not include parents of prospective pupils (i.e. those who have yet to join the school.)
- Complaints must be raised within three months (in the absence of mitigating reasons) of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. Complaints made outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.
- We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.
- Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all complaints, for a minimum of 7 years, unless it is a safeguarding complaint (see below) and it will be recorded if they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and the action taken by the school as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). Where there is a safeguarding concern about a member of staff, records must be preserved for the term of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and at least until the accused has reached normal pension age or for 10 years from the date of the allegation if it is longer.
- Less serious complaints are all recorded and stored centrally. These are monitored regularly by the Head, Deputy Head (Academic) and the Senior Deputy Head.
- This policy is made available on the school website to all parents, staff and to pupils.
- Boarders and their parents are informed by the School how they can contact ISI regarding any complaints about boarding welfare. ISI can be contacted on: ISI, Cap House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA. 0207 600 0100 or concerns@isi.net.
- Pupils will not be penalised as a result of any complaint from their parents.
- **COVID-19** – It is advisable for schools to review the time periods in their policies during the period of the pandemic to ensure they have any added flexibility they may need as a consequence of disruption or staff absence. This policy will remain under review in this regard (as noted above regarding timescales) during the Academic Year 2021-22.

Note: There were four complaints received by the School during the Academic Year 2021-2022, two of which reached stage 2 of this procedure.