

Complaints Procedure for Parents



1 Introduction

- 1.1 Wycombe Abbey is committed to the highest standards of teaching and pastoral care. Our aim is to work closely with the parents and their children in School. As a result, we hope that neither pupils nor parents will be dissatisfied with decisions taken within the School, but if you are for any reason, we very much want to hear about it so that we may do our best to resolve the matter. Whether the matter is then resolved informally or formally, this Policy constitutes Wycombe Abbey's Complaints Procedure.
- 1.2 This procedure applies to parents or legal guardians of current pupils, and may at our discretion apply to parents or legal guardians whose child has left the School within the previous 3 months. Where a pupil has been excluded, asked to leave, suspended for 11 School days or more, or suspended where the suspension would prevent the pupil from taking a public examination, please refer to the Exclusion, Removal and Review Policy.
- 1.3 This procedure is available on the School's website and parent portal in accordance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulation 2014.
- 1.4 This policy describes a three-stage procedure:

Stage 1: informal raising of a concern or difficulty notified orally or in writing to a member of staff

Stage 2: a formal complaint in writing to the Headmistress

Stage 3: a reference to the Complaints Review Panel

2 Timescales

We aim to resolve any concern or complaint in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to working days, we mean Monday to Friday, when School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website. During periods of temporary physical School closure, when access to site is restricted, a period of extension of additional working days may be applied, indicated in brackets.

3 Policy Statement

We need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. We recognise that a difficulty that is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment, which would be damaging to relationships and also to the culture of the School. You should never feel (or be made to feel) that a complaint will be taken amiss or will adversely affect a pupil or her opportunities at this School. The policy, however, distinguishes between a concern or difficulty that can be resolved informally and a formal complaint that will require investigation.

3.1 Complaints

Every concern or complaint notified to a member of staff will be recorded, together with the action taken.

4 Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- 4.1 We hope that most complaints and concerns will be resolved by agreement, reached quickly and informally.
- 4.2 If parents have a concern, difficulty or complaint, they should normally contact their child's Housemistress in the first instance. In many cases, the matter will by that means be resolved promptly by agreement. If the Housemistress cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for her to consult a Head of Department or a Deputy Head as appropriate in the process of seeking resolution. If the concern is regarding financial matters then parents should contact the Director of Finance in the first instance.

4.3 Complaints made directly to a Head of Department, a Deputy Head or the Headmistress will usually be referred to the relevant Housemistress in the first instance unless it is inappropriate to do so.

4.4 We will acknowledge a written notification by telephone, e-mail or letter normally within two (five) working days of receipt.

Should a complaint not be resolved informally by agreement within 15 (20) working days of receipt then the parents will be asked to proceed with their complaint in accordance with stage 2 of this Procedure.

4.5 Parents can contact the regulatory authority Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) regarding any complaint concerning the welfare of a boarder. Details of how to contact ISI or the LADO are given at the end of this procedure (but please note ISI's expectation that parents will usually follow the School's formal complaints procedure before contacting them).

4.6 Where the complaint is against the Headmistress, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chairman of Council, via the Clerk to the Council.

5 **Stage 2 – Formal Resolution**

5.1 Full details of any complaint that is unresolved under Stage 1, or of any dissatisfaction with some aspect of the School's policies, procedures, management or administration, should be set out in writing and sent with all relevant documents and your full contact details addressed to the Headmistress.

5.2 Your complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, e-mail or letter within two (five) working days during term time, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely timescale.

5.3 It may be necessary for the Headmistress or another senior member of staff to carry out an investigation.

5.4 Written records will be kept of all meetings and discussions between the Headmistress and parents and/or their child in relation to the complaint.

5.5 The Headmistress' aim would be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution to the complaint within 20 (30) working days from the receipt of the complaint. Please note that any complaint received within one month of the end of term or long leave may take longer to resolve owing to the limited availability of personnel during school holidays. The complainant would be informed of an expected date for completion should the investigation look to take more than 28 (35) working days in total.

6 **Stage 3 – The Complaints Review Panel**

6.1 A Complaints Review Panel ('Panel') hearing is a full-merits hearing of the complaint and a review of the decisions taken by the Headmistress, or Chair of Council as appropriate. The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint that have not previously been raised as part of the complaints procedure.

6.2 **The role of the Panel**

The Panel's task is to establish the facts surrounding the complaint that has been made by considering:

- the documents provided by both parties and
- any representations made by you and the Headmistress.

If, after due consideration of the merits of the complaint and all the facts, 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.

It will make these decisions on the balance of probabilities.

It is not within the powers of the Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils, or parents.

The Panel may make recommendations on these or any other issues to the Headmistress or to the full Governing Council as appropriate.

6.3 **Notification**

To request a hearing before the Complaints Review Panel about a decision please write to the Chair of Council within five working days of that decision being made. Your request will usually be considered only if you have completed the procedure at Stage 2. Please ensure that a copy of all relevant documents and your full contact details accompany your letter to the Chair of Council. Please state in your letter the outcome that you desire and all the grounds for your complaint. Please also send a list of the documents that you believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see. The Chair of Council will acknowledge your request in writing, normally within five working days. If you require assistance with your request, for example, because of a disability, please contact the Chair of Council who will be happy to make appropriate arrangements. In the Chair of Council's absence, this role will be fulfilled by the Clerk to the Council.

6.4 **Composition**

On receipt of a request for review, the Convenor will appoint a Panel consisting normally of a minimum of three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint (including the Convenor unless inappropriate in the circumstances of the particular case). One member of the Panel will be independent of the management and running of the school.

6.5 **Convening the Panel**

The Convenor will convene the Complaints Review Panel as soon as reasonably practicable, but the Panel will not normally sit during school holidays. You may ask the Convenor to tell you who has been appointed to sit on the Panel. The Panel will sit in person. Where it is not practical to do so a remote meeting will be held via conference or video call.

6.6 **Notice of Hearing**

Every effort will be made to enable the Panel hearing to take place within 15 (20) working days of the receipt of your request. As soon as reasonably practicable and, in any event, at least 5 (7) working days before the hearing, the Convenor will send you written notification of the date, time and place, or method, of the hearing, together with brief details of the Panel members who will be present.

6.7 **Attendance**

You will be invited to attend the hearing and may be accompanied by one other person such as a relative or friend. It is not necessary for that person to be legally qualified but if you do wish to be accompanied by a legally qualified person, acting in their professional capacity, please notify the School at least five working days before the hearing. Pupils may attend part or all of the hearing at the discretion of the Chair of the Panel. Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be delivered to the School for the attention of the Chair of Panel at least 5 clear working days prior to the hearing.

6.8 **The Chair**

The hearing will be chaired by one member of the Panel (chosen by its members) and will be conducted in an informal manner.

6.9 **Hearing**

All statements made at the hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes.

6.10 **Evidence**

The Chair will conduct the hearing in such a way as to ensure that all those present have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not a legal proceeding and the Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and / or may take written statements into account.

6.11 Conduct

All those attending the hearing are expected to show courtesy, restraint and good manners or, after due warning, the hearing may be adjourned or terminated at the discretion of the Chair. If terminated, the original decision may stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way in which the hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his / her comment will be noted. If the meeting is to be held as a remote meeting the Chair will give participants regular breaks in order to confer as necessary.

6.12 Adjournment

The Chair may, at their discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue or to take legal or other professional advice.

6.13 Decision

After due consideration of the matters discussed at the hearing, and unless all parties have agreed a resolution, the Panel shall reach a decision. The Panel's decision, findings and any recommendations may be notified orally at the hearing or subsequently and shall be confirmed in writing to the complainant by electronic mail or at his/her request by post, normally within 15 working days. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Council and the Headmistress. Reasons for the decision will be given. Any recommendations will be sent to the complainant, the Chairman of Council, the Headmistress and, where relevant, any person about whom the complaint has been made. The Review Decision will be final.

6.14 Private proceeding

A hearing before the Complaints Review Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other record or oral statement about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

6.15 Recording Complaints and use of personal data

Following resolution of a complaint a written record will be kept of all complaints, whether they are resolved at Stage 1 or Stage 2 or proceed to a Stage 3 Panel hearing and any actions taken as a result of the complaint, regardless of whether the complaint is upheld. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 Act requests access to them, or where other legal obligations apply.

The School processes data in accordance with the Privacy Notice for Parents and Pupils. When dealing with complaints the School may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of Parent
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records of all investigations (if appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name of member (s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes of the hearing (if appropriate)
- The panel's written decision (if appropriate)

This may include "special category personal data" where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint.

The School is mindful of its obligations under the UK General Data Protection Regulations and Data Protection Act 2018 to keep such information for no longer than is necessary, in accordance with Data Retention Policy but in most cases for a period of at least 6 years after a pupil leaves the School.

The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year is nil.

Formal Complaints Record	Stage 2	Stage 3
Academic Year 2020/2021	0	0
Academic Year 2021/2022	0	0

7 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 procedure.

8 Contacting External Organisations

The School is inspected by ISI, an independent organisation which reports to the Government on schools. Parents and pupils have the right to contact an inspector if they have a complaint concerning a pupil's welfare. ISI will usually expect parents or pupils to have followed the School's formal complaints procedure before contacting them.

However, you can report your concerns to ISI at:

Independent Schools Inspectorate CAP House 9 - 12 Long Lane London EC1A 9HA Telephone 020 7600 0100

Fax 020 7776 8849 info@isi.net

Alternatively, parents and pupils are advised that for matters in respect of safeguarding of children they may contact the duty officer at the Local Area Safeguarding Advisers (LADO) 01296 382070.

Member of staff	Bursar
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