

WINDLESHAM HOUSE SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS POLICY

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1. Introduction

Windlesham House School (“the School”) is committed to providing the best teaching and pastoral care it can for its pupils. It welcomes suggestions and comments from parents and takes seriously complaints which may arise, which can help strengthen educational and pastoral provision

The aim of this policy is to achieve an equitable and effective resolution of a concern about either the education or welfare of individual children in the care of the School. This policy is applicable to all parents of current pupils on the school's roll (or past pupils if the complaint was raised when the pupil was still registered). A copy is available on the School’s website and can also be obtained on request from the school office.

This policy also applies to our Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and after school care.

A termly report will be given to governors on complaints and their outcomes. The school will publish on its website the number of stage 3 complaints registered under this policy during the preceding school year.

2. What Constitutes a Complaint?

A 'concern' is an 'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'. For the purposes of this policy, a concern becomes a 'complaint' if it cannot be resolved in accordance with Stage 1 of the process below.

A 'complaint' is an expression of dissatisfaction about a specific department of the School or about an individual member of staff or any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School. A complaint may arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

3. Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All concerns and complaints will be handled seriously, sensitively and within the timescales set out in paragraph 4 below. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible. The School's target is to complete each stage of the procedure as set out below. Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, 'working days' refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays. This means that during school holidays, it may take longer to resolve a concern or complaint, although the School will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay.

It may also take longer to resolve a concern or 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 concern or complaint during term time will only be permitted on an exceptional basis and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay.

4. The Three-Stage Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- a) It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally, by speaking with the person best able to address the issue as follows:

Education and Pastoral Care: Any concerns or complaints regarding educational and pastoral care should be discussed with the pupil's Form Tutor in the first instance. If the concern or complaint relates to the Form Tutor, the pupil's Phase Leader should be contacted. If the concern or complaint relates to the Phase Leader, the Senior Deputy Head should be contacted.

Disciplinary Matters: A concern or complaint about disciplinary matters should first be raised with the pupil's Phase Leader who may refer to the member of staff who imposed the sanction. If unresolved, the Senior Deputy Head will be involved.

Financial matters: A concern or complaint about matters relating to fees or extras should be addressed to the Bursar.

- b) If a complaint relates directly to the Head, the Chair of Governors should be contacted directly via the Bursar's Office.

The member of staff receiving the concern or complaint will make a written record of the date on which it was received. Should the matter not be resolved within 10 working days of that date, or in the event that the member of staff and the parent(s) fail to reach a satisfactory resolution, then the parent(s) will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with stage 2 of this procedure.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- a) If the concern or complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parent(s) should put their complaint in writing to the Head. The Head will acknowledge receipt of the written notice within 5 working days and will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- b) The Head, or a senior member of staff, normally the Senior Deputy Head, a Deputy Head, or Phase Leader, will investigate and then meet with or speak to the parent(s) concerned, as soon as possible. A decision will normally be reached and notified to the parent(s) within 15 working days of receiving the written complaint.
- c) If the complaint is against the Head and it has not been resolved informally, the parent(s) should send the complaint in writing to the Bursar at eharris@windlesham.com. The Bursar will liaise between the parent(s), the Chair of Governors and as appropriate the Head. The Chair of Governors may call for further reports and any relevant documents and may meet members of staff and the parent(s). A decision will normally be reached by the Chair of Governors and notified to the parent(s) and relevant member of staff within 25 working days of receiving the writing complaint.
- d) If parents are not satisfied with the outcome of Stage 2 of the Complaints Process they may process to Stage 3 – Appeal.

Stage 3 – Appeal

- a) If parents seek to process to Stage 3, they should give notice in writing to the Bursar (eharris@windlesham.com) within 5 working days of receiving the outcome of Stage 2. The complaints will then be referred to a Complaints Panel for consideration and the following process will apply.
- b) In the event that the complaint is against the Bursar, the Stage 3 notice should be submitted to the Head who will forward the details to a nominated governor to take on the responsibilities of the Bursar set out below.
- c) The Bursar will acknowledge receipt of the written notice within 5 working days and will refer the complaint to the Chair of Governors who will appoint the members of the Complaints Panel (the “Panel”). The Bursar will act as secretary to the Panel. The Bursar will report to the Chair of Governors and the Head to confirm that consideration of the complaint is proceeding in accordance with the policy but not in respect of the substance of the Panel’s consideration.

- d) The Panel will consist of three members, two of whom will be Governors and one of whom will be independent of the management and running of the School. None of the members of the Panel will have been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint.
- e) An Appeal Hearing (“the Hearing”) will be scheduled to take place as soon as practical, normally within 30 working days of receipt of the parent(s’) notice referred to in stage 3a) above. If this timeframe is not practical, the Bursar will write to the parent(s) within 10 working days of receipt of the parent (s’) notice and agree, with them, an alternative timeframe.
- f) The parent(s) should supply relevant documentation to the Bursar, including copies of their previous written complaint to the Head and any other documentation they may wish to rely on, not more than 5 working days after the date of notification of the Hearing. Documentation must be relevant to those matters set out in the complaint.
- g) The Bursar will collate all relevant papers and provide a copy of the full complaint file to the parent(s), each member of the Panel and the Head. The relevant papers will include the complaint in writing made by the parent(s) and any relevant documents provided by them and the response by the School and members of staff, setting out clearly the School’s investigations, conclusions and actions to date.
- h) The Panel will determine the terms of reference for the Hearing and the steps to be taken leading up to and during the Hearing. It may request further facts, evidence or analysis in advance of the hearing.
- i) The parent(s) may be accompanied to the Hearing by one other person. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate. The Hearing will proceed even if the parent(s) chooses not to attend unless they indicate that they are now satisfied and do not wish to proceed.
- j) After due consideration of all facts presented at the Hearing which it considers relevant, the Panel will make its findings and recommendations. The Bursar will send a copy of the decision and the reasons for it to the parent(s), the Chair of Governors, the Head and other members of staff involved within 10 working days of the Hearing. The decision of the Panel will be final. The decision will be kept confidential, but will be available for inspection at the School.
- k) The full Board of Governors or their delegated sub-committee shall consider all Panel decisions and recommendations and determine what further action should be implemented by the School.

5. Mediation

At any stage of the process, it may be helpful to consider mediation, or a facilitated discussion by an experienced mediator to address difficult or sensitive issues as constructively as possible.

6. 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 Windlesham as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

7. Recording Keeping

The School will keep a written record of all Stage 1, 2 and 3 concerns and complaints and any action taken by the School as a result (regardless of whether the complaint was upheld). At the School's discretion, additional records may be kept which may contain the following information:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent(s)
- Name of pupil
- Description of the issue
- Records and a chronology of all the 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 notes of phone conversations)
- Decision or resolution of stages 1 and 2
- Notes/minutes of any Panel hearing and
- The Stage 3 decision

A log of complaints and concerns will be kept by the Head's PA and monitored by the Head. Records of complaints which proceed to Stage 3 will be kept by the Bursar. The School's record will show the action taken, and whether or not the complaint is upheld and any actions taken. Complaints about boarding and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) will be identified as such.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1)(b) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the School will make available to the parent(s) of pupils and provide, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, details of the Complaints policy and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure (i.e. Stage 3) during the preceding school year.

8. Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated confidentially. Papers generated by or for the purposes of the Complaints Procedure will be kept confidential to the parent(s), the members of staff involved, the members of the Panel, the Head, the Bursar, the Chair of Governors and staff relevant to the complaint. Information relating to the complaint will be dealt with in accordance with the School's responsibilities under data protection legislation. Information may be disclosed where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education Act 2008 requests access to information and in so far as it is required of the School by any other legal obligation.

9. External Process

Parents should follow the three stages of this Complaints Procedure. If parents remain dissatisfied, they can contact the Independent Schools Inspectorate (Ground Floor, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA; 020 7600 0100, concerns@isi.net) regarding any complaint concerning their welfare.

If parents do not believe the School is meeting the EYFS requirements they can contact Ofsted (Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD, Tel: 0300 123 1231, enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

Windlesham House School received 0 Stage 3 complaints during 21-22, 1 during 22-23 (which was not upheld) and 1 during 23-24.

Annex - Overview of Complaints Process and Timings

Stage 1 (Informal)

- **Complaint/Concern submitted to member of staff**
- **Resolved within 10 working days of it being received by a member of staff. If not resolved proceed to stage 2.**

Stage 2 (Formal)

- **Complaint submitted in writing to Head.**
- **Complaint acknowledged within 5 working days**
- **Head (or senior member of staff) to investigate and speak to parent(s) concerned**
- **Decision provided to parent(s) within 15 working days of complaint being submitted in writing**
- **If complaint is against the Head then should be submitted to the Chair via the Bursar whom will investigate and provide decision within 25 working days of complaint being submitted**

Stage 3 (Appeal)

- **Parent(s) write to Bursar within 5 working days of receiving stage 2 decision setting out grounds for appeal.**
- **Complaint acknowledged within 5 working days**
- **Panel formed and hearing occurs within 30 working days of the appeal being submitted.**
- **Decision of panel on whether to uphold stage 2 decision is communicated to parent(s) within 10 working days of the hearing**