

Complaints Procedure for Parents

Withington Girls' School

September 2016

WITHINGTON GIRLS' SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR PARENTS

Introduction

Withington Girls' School has always been proud of its positive, friendly and supportive ethos and of the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. There are many people available and willing to help with any worries and difficulties that pupils might experience during their time at the School – details are given within the Pupil Planners. If parents of current pupils have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School in accordance with the following Procedure.

The School's Complaints Procedure for Parents is drafted in accordance with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

This policy applies to complaints from parents of current pupils and to parents of former pupils if the complaint was raised when the pupil was registered at the School.

When we refer to **working days** in this policy, we mean Monday to Friday, when School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website, as are the number of formal complaints received in the preceding academic year.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

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

- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their daughter's Form Tutor. In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for her/him to consult the Head of Year or a Head of Department or member of the Senior Leadership Team. The Senior Leadership Team is comprised of the Headmistress, Deputy Head, Director of Studies, Head of Junior School and the Bursar.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Year, Head of Department or a member of the Senior Leadership Team will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor or Subject Teacher, unless the Head of Year, Head of Department or member of the Senior Leadership Team deems it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.
- An informal complaint provided in writing will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as practicable during the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing but a record of the matter will be made.
- The person dealing with the complaint will make a written record of all complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved within ten working days, or in the event that a satisfactory resolution with parents cannot be reached, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.
- Complaints against any member of the Senior Leadership Team will always be requested to be made under Stage 2 of the procedure and will be handled by the Headmistress, save where the complaint is about the Headmistress in which case the matter will be handled by the Chair of Governors.

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 Headmistress. The complaint will be acknowledged within two working days, and as soon as practicable during the holidays. The Headmistress will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Headmistress will meet with the parents concerned, normally within seven working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

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- It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out and the Headmistress will ask a senior member of staff to act as investigator and / or may involve one or more Governors. The Investigator may request additional information from the parents and will probably wish to speak to them personally. The investigator will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Headmistress.
- Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Headmistress 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 Headmistress will also give reasons for her decision. The Headmistress will aim to provide the parents with her decision within 28 days of receipt of the complaint. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay, the parents will be notified of this and informed of the new timescales as soon as possible. Any complaint received within one month of the end of term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to the presence of school holidays and the unavailability of members of staff required for the investigation to be undertaken properly.
- If parents are not satisfied with the Headmistress's decision, 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 must put their request in writing to the Clerk to the Governors. It is expected that the complaints procedure will progress in a timely manner and parents should make the request within five working days of the decision complained of. The request will usually only be considered if the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been completed and the Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure. The written request should include copies of all relevant documents, details of the grounds of complaint and the desired outcome and a list of the documents which the parents believe to be in the School's possession and wish the Panel to see.
- The Complaints Panel hearing is a review of the decisions taken by the Headmistress. The role of the Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
 - the documents provided by both parties and
 - any representations made by the Parents and the Headmistressand to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether each complaint is made out.
- 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 matters or any other issues to the Headmistress and / or to the Governing Body.
- The Clerk will acknowledge the request for a hearing within two working days of receipt (or as soon as practicable during school holidays) and will convene the Panel. 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 Governing Body and the Panel members will choose one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel. The Clerk to the Governors will schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 14 working days of receipt of the request.
- Copies of additional documents you wish the Panel to consider should be sent to the Clerk to the Governors to be received at least 7 working days prior to the Hearing.
- 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. The Clerk will circulate a copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Panel to all parties not later than seven days prior to the hearing.

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- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative or friend. The Panel is not legal proceedings and so legal representation is not necessary. The Clerk to the Governors must be given seven days' notice if the friend or relation is legally qualified and the parents should note that the Panel will wish to speak to the parents directly. This person will not be permitted to act as an advocate or to address the Hearing unless invited to do so by the Chair of the Panel.
- The Hearing will be conducted in an informal manner. The parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The hearing is not legal proceedings 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.
- 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. A clerk appointed by the Panel will take a handwritten minute of the proceedings.
- 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 will stand. Any person who is dissatisfied with any aspect of the way the Hearing is conducted must say so before the proceedings go any further and his / her comment will be minuted.
- Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how this should be carried out. The Chair may, at his / her discretion, adjourn the hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue, which may include an adjournment to take legal advice.
- When the Chair of the Panel considers that all the issues have been sufficiently discussed, he / she will conclude the Hearing. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision on a balance of probabilities, unless there is an agreed position, and make findings and recommendations, which it shall complete within seven working days of the hearing. A copy of those findings and recommendations will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. A copy will also be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Governing Body and the Headmistress.

The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's complaints procedure.

Record keeping

A written record will be kept of all formal complaints and of whether they have been resolved at the Stage 2 or have proceeded to a Panel Hearing including the action taken by the School as a result of the complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

Parents can be assured that all complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a Body conducting an Inspection under section 108 or 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008, requests access to them.

In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept only for as long as is considered to be reasonably necessary in the circumstances.

Effective date of the policy	August 2016
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Circulation	Governors / teaching staff / all staff / parents / pupils on request
Status	Mandatory

There were no formal complaints received in the year ended 31st August 2016.