
Policy: Complaints Procedure

1. Introduction

West Buckland School welcomes suggestions and comments from parents, and takes seriously concerns and complaints that may arise. There are many ways for students and parents to raise an opinion: the parents forum, through tutors, student voice etc... there is a separate procedure for students to raise concerns, this document refers to parental complaints.

This policy applies to parents in the Prep and Senior school and therefore referral at stage 2 is likely to be conducted by the Headmaster of that area of the school unless it is stated or agreed otherwise.

2. Stage One – Informal Resolution

- 2.1. It is hoped that most concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- 2.2. If parents have a concern they should normally contact the appropriate member of staff. Staff will consult with their line managers on how to respond to the concern.
- 2.3. Concerns communicated directly to the Headmaster or other member of the Senior Leadership Team will usually be discussed with the relevant housemaster/mistress or other relevant member of staff unless it is deemed appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- 2.4. Should the matter not be resolved within ten working days or in the event that there is a failure to reach a resolution which satisfies the parents, then they will be advised to proceed to Stage 2 of this procedure.

3. Stage Two – Formal Resolution

- 3.1. If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- 3.2. In most cases, the Headmaster (or in his absence the Deputy Head) will speak to the parents concerned, normally within five working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- 3.3. It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations.
- 3.4. The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- 3.5. Once the Headmaster 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 Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision.
- 3.6. If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

4. Stage Three – Panel Hearing

- 4.1. If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they will be referred to the Clerk to the Governors, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel.

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- 4.2. 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.
- 4.3. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Board of Governors. The Clerk to the Governors, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within ten working days of receipt of the parents' written request to invoke a Panel Hearing.
- 4.4. 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 five working days prior to the hearing.
- 4.5. The parents can attend the hearing, and if they want, they can be accompanied by one other person. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- 4.6. If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation.
- 4.7. 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 five working days of the Hearing. A copy of findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about. The findings and recommendations will also be available for inspection on the school premises by the Chairman of the Governor and the Headmaster. The decision of the Panel will be final.
- 4.8. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. Written records are kept of all complaints, noting whether they have been resolved at the preliminary stages or have proceeded to a panel hearing and are reviewed regularly. Records should show the date received, date of response, name, nature of complaint, action taken by the school and outcome. Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

5. Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively.

- 5.1. During Term Time: Complaints will be acknowledged within five working days if received during term time. It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the school's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 days if the complaint is lodged during term-time and as soon as practicable during holiday periods. Stage 3, the Complaints Panel Hearing, will be completed within a further 28 days, if the appeal is lodged during term-time.
- 5.2. Out of term time: Complaints received out of term time will be acknowledged as soon as practicable. In order to respond properly it is essential to have the appropriate members of staff available to investigate the matter properly and to make a proper response. Out of term

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time, it is not likely that all of the appropriate members of staff will be immediately available and so a revised timescale will be required. Every effort will be made to ensure that complainants are kept informed of the proposed timescale for all stages of the process, and that complaints are managed in a timely but appropriate manner in accord with the spirit of the procedures detailed for term time.

6. Monitoring Complaints

- 6.1. No complainant, whether adult or pupil, will be penalized for making a complaint in good faith.
- 6.2. Should a member of the public raise a concern or complaint, this will be dealt with as if the matter had been raised by a parent, in accordance with this policy.
- 6.3. A formal complaint registered on the School's Complaints Register is one that has been registered by a parent, pupil or third party and is encompassed by the School's Complaints Procedure for pupils or parents. By its nature a formal complaint is more serious and severe than an informal complaint or concern. A complaint will normally, but not exclusively, be focused upon a person or persons associated with the School, their conduct or behaviour or will generally identify a perceived failure, error or breach of contract (in the broadest sense of the term) between the School and the complainant.
- 6.4. All informal complaints will be recorded as follows:
 - 6.4.1. Pupil Complaints by the Deputy Head Pastoral
 - 6.4.2. Parental Complaints by the Deputy Head
 - 6.4.3. Prep or EYFS complaints by the Deputy Head of the Prep School
- 6.5. Formal Complaints and those proceeding to a panel hearing are recorded centrally by the Headmaster. There have been THREE formal complaints made during the school year preceding the last review date.
- 6.6. If Social Services need to be contacted the telephone number for Devon MASH is: 0345 155 1071. Concerns may also be addressed to ISI (Tel No: 0207 600 0100).

7. Complaints in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 7.1. Parents of pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage may use the procedure identified above but they may also complain to Ofsted directly on Tel. No: 0300 123 1231 or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
- 7.2. The School will investigate written complaints relating to their fulfilment of the EYFS requirements and notify complainants of the outcome of the investigation within 28 days of having received the complaint.
- 7.3. The record of complaints must be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request. Records of complaints will be kept for three years.

Author/Updated by: Mr PR Stapleton and Mr NG Robinson

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