



Woburn Lower School

Complaints Procedure for Parents

All Woburn Lower School are committed to providing the best education for all and we want our pupils to be healthy, happy and safe and reach their full potential. We recognise the importance of establishing and maintaining good relationships with parents, carers and the wider community. We are aware that there may be occasions where people have concerns or complaints and the following procedure sets out the steps that should be followed in order to resolve these as quickly as possible.

The Governing Body is required, under Section 29 of the Education Act 2011, to have in place a procedure for dealing with complaints. It is expected that all complaints will be referred to the school in the first instance. In situations where it has not been possible to settle a complaint through this process the Local Authority may be able to advise parents/carers/others and the school in order to help resolve difficulties, but will not be able to become involved if the steps set out below have not been followed.

Complainants are encouraged to follow through each stage of the procedure, as appropriate, in order to resolve their concerns.

If governors are approached regarding a complaint, they should be mindful not to act in an individual complaint outside the formal procedure or become involved or have discussions with other governors at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel a later stage of the procedure. Individual complaints would not be heard by the whole governing body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up to consider further action in the event that a serious complaint is substantiated.

STEP 1: Informal

Please start by telling the class teacher about your concern. This is usually the best and quickest way of resolving issues.

- It is recommended that you make an appointment to speak to the class teacher as soon as possible as this will give both parties the opportunity to talk about the issue in an appropriate manner and without being interrupted.
- It is important to recognise that schools are busy organisations and it may not be possible to offer an appointment straight away.
- The purpose of this meeting should be to establish the nature of the concern and to seek a realistic resolution to the problem.
- The class teacher will make a brief written record of the concern raised and any actions agreed.

STEP 2: Informal escalation

If you feel dissatisfied with the outcome of discussions with the class teacher, please ask for an appointment to meet with the Headteacher.

- The purpose of this meeting should be to establish the nature of the ongoing concern, what has been discussed with the class teacher so far and any actions arising from the initial meeting.
- It is in everyone's interest, particularly the child or children, for concerns to be sorted out quickly and smoothly. However, it may be that the Headteacher will need to look into what has happened since the initial meeting before they can suggest how your concern might be resolved. If this is the case, it should be agreed how and within what timescale they will contact you to let you know the outcome of their enquiries and what actions they have taken/propose to take.

The Headteacher will keep a written record of the concern raised, any meetings/interviews and actions agreed.

STEP 3: Formal

Complaint letter to the Headteacher and Chair of Governors

If you feel that the issue you have raised has not been resolved through the informal process and you wish to pursue it further you may raise it through the formal procedure. To do this you must write a formal letter of complaint to the Headteacher and Chair of Governors.

Your letter should set out clearly the concern which has previously been discussed and why you feel that the issue is unresolved. It is also helpful if you can set out in your letter what resolution you are seeking. **(The School can supply a proforma. See Appendix 1).**

• Moving to the formal complaints procedure is a serious step. In consideration of future home/school relationships everyone concerned will need to concentrate on finding a resolution to the issue and negotiate an agreement as to how this can best be achieved.

The governing body must consider all written complaints within three weeks of receipt and arranges a meeting to discuss the complaint, and invites the person making it to attend the meeting, so that s/he can explain her complaint in more

detail. The school gives the complainant at least three days' notice of the meeting.

After hearing all the evidence, the governors consider their decision and inform the parent about it in writing. The governors do all they can at this stage to resolve the complaint to the parent's satisfaction.

The role of the Chair of the Committee

The Chair of the Committee has a key role, ensuring that:

- The remit of the panel is explained to the parties and each party has the opportunity of putting their case without undue interruption;
- The issues are addressed
- Key findings of fact are made
- Parents and others who may not be used to speaking at such a hearing are put at ease
- The hearing is conducted in an informal manner with each party treating the other with respect and courtesy
- The panel is open minded and acting independently
- No member of the panel has a vested interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- Each side is given the opportunity to state their case and ask questions
- Written material is seen by all parties.

The meeting will be conducted as outlined below.

Stage A	Introductions of everyone present and clarification of the conduct of the hearing. Panel Chair checks that everyone has a copy of this Format of Hearing on the table.
Stage B	Parents present complaint highlighting points made in their written complaint and other documentation. Witnesses are called as and when required. Panel questions Parents to clarify the points they make.
Stage C	Headteacher presents the facts as s/he perceives them - highlighting points made in the written response and other documentation. Witnesses are called as and when required. Panel questions Headteacher to clarify the points she has made.
Stage D	Parents summarise their case highlighting evidence including anything that has emerged in the questioning.

Stage E	Headteacher summarises the case for the school highlighting evidence. This should include the school's response and actions in relation to the complaint before the hearing and anything that has emerged in the questioning.
Close	Panel Chair thanks Parents and Headteacher for attending and gives an indication of when they can expect to hear the outcome. Parents and Headteacher leave the room together. Panel considers all the evidence and comes to its conclusion.

Concerns or complaints specifically about the Headteacher

Where you are unhappy about the decision the Headteacher has made about your complaint, this does not become a complaint about the Headteacher. If you feel that the complaint has not been resolved you should move to Step 4 of the procedure. If you have a concern or complaint that is specifically about the Headteacher and which has not been resolved at the informal stage, then you must write a formal letter of complaint to the Chair of Governors. The school will provide you with the Chair of Governors' name and you should write to him or her at the school address, marking the envelope 'urgent, private and confidential'.

- The Chair of Governors should acknowledge receipt of the letter within 5 school Days.
- For complaints specifically about the Headteacher the Chair of Governors will arrange for the complaint to be investigated, either by him/herself or by an appropriate independent investigator, and for the process set out in Step 3 to be followed.

Limitations within the policy:

Time limits:

Complaints need to be considered and resolved as quickly and efficiently as possible. As such, complaints made under this procedure will ordinarily be rejected if they are not brought within 3 months, unless there are exceptional circumstances. (Exceptional circumstances will be determined by the Headteacher/Chair of Governors on a case by case basis, and advice may be sought from the Local Authority in this regard).

Safeguarding referrals:

Schools have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of their pupils under section 175 of the Education Act 2011. This includes making referrals to the appropriate organisation, usually local authority children's social care services, if they have a concern about the welfare of a child. It is not for the school to investigate or make a judgment about possible abuse or neglect but they must refer any concerns they may have. As such, any response to an investigation in relation to a complaint about a safeguarding referral made by school staff will be limited to

considering whether the appropriate action was taken at the time the referral was made on the basis of the information available to the referrer at that time and in accordance with the safeguarding policy.

Complaints regarding SEND:

Parents/carers of a child with Special Educational Needs or Disability should follow the same three step process as above. The school SENDco will be informed by the class teacher at step 1, and the parent/carer can also ask for them to be involved in meetings at any stage of the complaint procedure.

Allegations of abuse:

Allegations of abuse against a member of school staff must be reported to the Headteacher immediately. Allegations of abuse against the Headteacher must be reported to the Chair of Governors immediately. The Local Authority Designation Officer (LADO) should be contacted for advice and '[Staff Facing an Allegation of Abuse - Guidelines on practice and procedure](#)' document followed. (0300 300 4832/4833).

If a complaint is brought against an outside education provider the school would contact the Local Authority Designation Officer (LADO) for advice.

Vexatious complaints:

The majority of complaints are resolved through a properly managed complaints procedure. However, there are occasions when:

- despite all stages of the procedure having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If a complainant tries to reopen the same issue the Chair of Governors may write informing them that all stages of the procedure have been exhausted and the matter is considered to be closed.
- complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. In these circumstances the school may take action in accordance with Appendix 2 of this procedure.

STEP 4: Complaints not resolved through the formal procedure

If you believe that the school has not properly followed its complaints procedure or has not acted fairly or reasonably in responding to your complaint you may refer the matter to the DfE School Complaints Unit (SCU) for independent review. The Unit considers complaints if, under the formal procedure, remains unresolved or if the complaint is specifically about the Headteacher.

You will need to contact the SCU giving the details of your complaint, what action you have already taken to try and resolve your complaint and attaching a copy of the written response from the school.

Appendix 1

COMPLAINT FORM - STEP 3, FORMAL COMPLAINT

**Please complete and return to.....who will
acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.**

Your Name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupils:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Please give details of your complaint:

**What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your
complaint. (Who did you speak to and what was the response?)**

What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so please give details.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

Appendix 2

POLICY FOR DEALING WITH PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS / HARASSMENT IN SCHOOLS

The Headteacher and staff deal with specific complaints as part of their day-to-day management of the school in accordance with the **School's Complaints**

Procedure. The majority of complaints are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant.

However, there are occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns.

In these circumstances the school may take action in accordance with this policy.

1. AIMS OF POLICY

The aims of this policy are to:

- uphold the standards of courtesy and reasonableness that should characterise all communication between the School and persons who wish to express a concern or pursue a complaint
- support the well-being of pupils, staff and everyone else who has legitimate interest in the work of the School, including governors and parents
- deal fairly, honestly and properly with those who make persistent or vexatious complaints and those who harass members of staff in school while ensuring that other stakeholders suffer no detriment.

2. HUMAN RIGHTS

2.1 In implementing this policy the School will seek to ensure that its actions are in accordance with its obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Convention Rights embodied within it in order to protect the Human Rights of both persistent complainants and all other stakeholders.

3. PARENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF THE SCHOOL:

3.1 Parents/carers/members of the public who raise either informal or formal issues or complaints with the School can expect the School to:

- a) regularly communicate to parents/carers in writing:
 - (i) how and when problems can be raised with the School
 - (ii) the existence of the School's complaints procedure, and
 - (iii) the existence of the Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints and/or Harassment in Schools
- b) respond within a reasonable time
- c) be available for consultation within reasonable time limits bearing in mind the needs of the pupils/students within the school and the nature of the complaint
- d) respond with courtesy and respect
- e) attempt to resolve problems using reasonable means in line with the School's complaints procedure, other policies and practice and in line with guidance and advice from the Local Authority
- f) keep complainants informed of progress towards a resolution of the issues raised

4. THE SCHOOL'S EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS/CARERS/MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

4.1 The School can expect parents/carers/members of the public who wish to raise problems with the School to:

- a) treat all school staff with courtesy and respect
- b) respect the needs and well-being of pupils and staff in the School
- c) avoid any use, or threatened use, of violence to people or property

- d) avoid any aggression or verbal abuse
- e) recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the School a reasonable time to respond
- f) recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take some time
- g) (in the case of a complaint) follow the School's Complaints Procedure

5. WHO IS A PERSISTENT COMPLAINANT?

5.1 For the purpose of this policy, a persistent complainant is a parent/carer or member of the public who complains about issues, either formally or informally, or frequently raises issues that the complainant considers to be within the remit of the School and whose behaviour is unreasonable. Such behaviour may be characterised by:

- a) actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious
- b) prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint
- c) an insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes
- d) an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner
- e) an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful.

5.2 For the purpose of this policy, harassment is the unreasonable pursuit of such actions as in

- (a) to (e) above in such a way that they:
 - a) appear to be targeted over a significant period of time on one or more members of school staff and/or
 - b) cause ongoing distress to individual member(s) of school staff and/or
 - c) have a significant adverse effect on the whole/parts of the school community and/or
 - d) are pursued in a manner which can be perceived as intimidating and oppressive by the recipient. This could include situations where persistent demands and criticisms, whilst not particularly taxing or serious when viewed in isolation, have a cumulative effect over time of undermining confidence, well-being and health.

6. THE SCHOOL'S ACTIONS IN CASES OF PERSISTENT OR VEXATIOUS COMPLAINTS OR HARASSMENT

6.1 In the first instance the School will verbally inform the complainant that his/her behaviour is considered to be becoming unreasonable/unacceptable and, if it is not modified, action may be taken in accordance with this policy.

6.2 This will be confirmed in writing.

6.3 If the behaviour is not modified the School will take some or all of the following actions as necessary, having regard to the nature of the complainant's behaviour and the effect of this on the school community:

- a) inform the complainant in writing that his/her behaviour is now considered by the School to be unreasonable/unacceptable and, therefore, to fall under the terms of this policy
- b) inform the complainant that all meetings with a member of staff will be conducted with a second person present and that notes of meetings may be taken in the interests of all parties
- c) inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, all routine communication with the complainant to the School should be by letter only
- d) (in the case of physical or verbal aggression) refer to NAHT 'Managing Violent and Abusive Visitors to School' guidance.
- e) consider taking advice from the Local Authority on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation

6.4 Legitimate new complaints will still be considered even if the person making them is, or has been, subject to the Policy for Dealing with Persistent or Vexatious Complaints and/or Harassment in Schools. In these circumstances advice may be sought from the Local Authority.

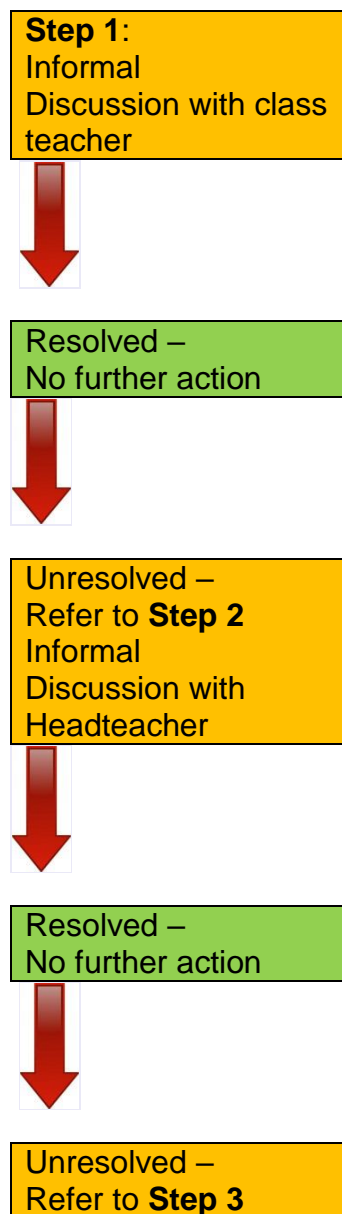
6.5 If a complainant's persistent complaining/harassing behaviour is modified and is then resumed at a later date within a reasonable period of time, the School may resume the process identified above at an appropriate level. In these circumstances advice may be sought from the Local Authority.

7. REVIEW

7.1 The School will review as appropriate, and at a minimum once in a school year, any sanctions applied in the context of this policy.

Appendix 3

Flowchart of procedure for handling concerns and complaints:



Written complaint to
Chair of Governors



Resolved –
Written response
No further action



Unresolved –
Refer to **Step 4**
Referral to DfE
Schools Complaints
Unit

Related policies:

SEND

Governor:

Date: September 2024

Headteacher: Mrs P Black

Date: September 2024

Review: September 2025