

Walderslade Girls' School

Complaints Policy



Principles

At Walderslade Girls' School we aim to establish and maintain positive partnerships within our school and wider community. We welcome and encourage feedback and recognize its valuable contribution to our internal routine, rigorous and robust self evaluation processes. We strive to resolve any conflict without recourse to formal procedures but recognise that parents/carers and others have the right to make a formal complaint and to have these complaints taken seriously.

We aim to:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible.
- Have a clearly understood complaints procedure which is available on the school web-site or on request from the school office.
- Examine complaints in a sensitive, impartial and non-adversarial manner.
- Deal with complaints swiftly with clearly communicated updates and time-lines for actions.
- Investigate complaints fully and fairly by an independent person or agency where necessary.
- Address all the issues raised and provide feedback and appropriate redress where required.
- Review practice where findings suggest an improvement is required.

What is a complaint?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction about the standards of service, actions or the lack of action by the School or its staff, affecting an individual pupil, person or group of pupils or people.

You may want to complain if you think:

- we have not treated you fairly or politely; or
- we have not done something we should have done; or
- we have done something badly.

When we receive complaints we will:

- deal with people courteously and in a sensitive and helpful manner
- put things right where it is clear that we have not given the service that you have the right to expect
- analyse complaints so that we can plan for the future by taking your views into account.

Complaints Procedure

For clarity of means and purpose, the process of making a complaint is set out in stages:

Stage one – Informal stage

Most issues that arise can be dealt with to a satisfactory conclusion via informal means that is, raising the issue with the most relevant member of staff. For day to day issues this will normally be the Head of Year (HOY) for your child's year group. Other members of staff who can deal with curriculum issues swiftly and effectively will be the Head of Department or Head of Faculty. Members of the Senior Leadership team – Assistant Headteachers, the Deputy Headteacher and the Headteacher are always available to speak to or to meet with parents to discuss and resolve concerns and issues informally.

We consider that taking concerns seriously at the earliest possible stage may reduce the need to move to the formal complaints process. The requirement to have a complaints procedure should not be seen to undermine efforts to resolve concerns informally. In most cases the teacher or person delivering the service is best placed to resolve the issue which may include apologizing where necessary or appropriate. To see the Headteacher it is normal practice to book an appointment.

In some cases it may be considered by the complainant/ teacher or service provider that the issue should be referred to another member of staff. In most cases this may be someone more senior however the most important factor is that the nominated person deals with the complaint objectively and impartially.

Stage two – Formal stage

Where initial attempts to resolve a concern are unsuccessful and the person raising the issue remains dissatisfied and indicates their wish to take the matter further the formal procedure will be invoked.

If you are unhappy with the outcome of stage one you can take the matter further and complain in writing to the Headteacher. Your complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 3 working days. The issue will be fully investigated and a full written response will be sent or a face to face meeting will take place within a further 10 working days.

Investigation

This is a key part of the procedure. The Headteacher may appoint an investigating officer who will usually be the Deputy Headteacher or a member of the Senior Leadership Team, or may investigate the complaint herself. The investigating officer will ensure that they:

- Establish what has happened to date and who has been involved.
- Clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved.
- Contact the complainant to advise and update them and where necessary to gain further information or clarification.

- Interview those involved in the matter or those complained of advising them they may be accompanied.
- Carry out all stages of the procedure with an open mind.
- Keep notes of all the interviews conducted.
- Continue to seek ways to bring the matter to a resolution.

The result of the Headteacher's investigation will be communicated in writing to the complainant and it should be assumed that the complaint has been resolved and should be subsequently laid to rest.

The Headteacher will wherever possible invite the complainant to a meeting to discuss the complaint before deciding how to proceed with an investigation. It may also be deemed appropriate to meet with the complainant again to review the findings of the investigation and to seek a resolution to the issue.

In cases of serious complaint e.g. cases of personal injury the matter will be examined by the Headteacher who may delegate some of the information collation but not the decision of the action to be taken. If the complaint is against the Headteacher then the matter should be passed to the Chair of Governors.

If the complaint is of a serious safeguarding nature the Headteacher may refer to the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO).

Stage 3 – Formal

Where the Headteacher has not been able to resolve the complaint and the complainant is still not satisfied or where the complaint is about the Headteacher then the complainant should write to the Chair of Governors outlining details of the complaint and explaining why they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the stage two investigation and resolution.

The Chair of Governors will convene a Governing Body Complaints panel that will ensure that:

- The complaint is acknowledged within 5 working days.
- The Governors' panel of 3 members meet within one month (with the exception of school holidays) to hear the complaint.
- The letter advising the complainant of the meeting contains information regarding their right to submit additional information which must be received at least 5 working days before the meeting.
- Witnesses may be called and all parties should be advised.

The Remit of the Complaints Appeal Panel

- Dismiss the complaint in whole or in part.
- Uphold the complaint whole or in part.
- Decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the conflict.

- Recommend changes to systems or procedures to ensure a similar issue does not reoccur.

Role of the Clerk to the Governors

The Clerk will be the central contact point for the Appeal Procedure and will oversee all the administration for the meeting. They are responsible for:

- Setting the date, time and venue for hearing.
- Collating any written material and circulating it to all parties in advance.
- Record the proceedings.
- Notify parties of decision.

The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body or the Nominated Governor

The nominated governor role:

- Check that the correct procedure has been followed;
- If a hearing is appropriate, notify the clerk to arrange the panel.

The Role of the Chair of the Panel

The chair of the panel 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. If a new issue arises it would be useful to give all parties the opportunity to consider and comment on it.

Checklist for Panel Hearing

The panel needs to take the following points into account:

- Witnesses are only required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence.
- After introductions, the complainant is invited to explain their complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.

- The Headteacher may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The Headteacher is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The complainant may question both the Headteacher and the witnesses after each has spoken.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up their complaint.
- The Headteacher is then invited to sum up the school's actions and response to the complaint.
- Both parties leave together while the panel decides on the issues.
- The chair explains that both parties will hear from the panel within a set time scale.

Notification of Outcome

The Chair of the panel should notify the complainant of the panel's decision in writing. The letter should advise if there are any further rights of appeal and to whom they should be addressed.

Evaluation of Policy and Levels of Complaint

The Governing Body will seek to monitor the level of complaints and review their outcomes on a regular basis to ensure that procedures are followed and revised as appropriate. A designated senior member of the governing Body will review the complaints file on an annual basis.

This policy will be reviewed by the Headteacher and the Governing Body annually.

If you have raised your concerns with the school, governing body and the local authority and you still remain dissatisfied, Ofsted may be able to consider your complaint. You can contact the Ofsted helpdesk on 08456 40 40 45 or email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk

Statutory Complaints

Some complaints come outside the scope of the School's own complaints procedure and are shown below. They are matters where there are already specific processes in place and should be referred to the Local Authority.

Admissions

Medway has responsibility for admissions to community and controlled schools. Any appeals or complaints should be referred to the admissions team. Admissions to aided and foundation schools should be dealt with by the diocese and/or governors.

Child Protection & Safeguarding

Child protection issues regarding pupils arising in school are managed by the Designated Safeguarding Lead and Headteacher and will normally be referred to the relevant integrated area team for investigation of the family circumstances. The School's prime responsibility is to trigger the appropriate procedure through the LA and the school must not attempt to investigate the issues independently.

If a complaint of a safeguarding nature is made against a staff member the Headteacher will refer to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

Curriculum

Complaints about the curriculum will initially be considered by the Senior Leadership Team.

Complaints should be made using the same appropriate channels i.e. a letter of complaint to the Headteacher. If you are still not satisfied a letter should be sent to the Chair of Governors.

Exclusions

Governing bodies are required to set up exclusions committees to consider exclusions. Guidance for procedures have been issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families. <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/exclusions/guidance>

Special Educational Needs

Parents and school staff will naturally be in close contact about the special educational needs provision for individual children and concerns will normally be resolved between parents and the school. However, formal complaints should be referred to the special educational needs team if they cannot be resolved by following the School's Complaints Procedure.