



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Version 1.1

*Resources
Committee*



Wallingford School

Complaints Procedure

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1. Introduction

The Governors of Wallingford School have adopted the following procedure to deal with formal complaints from members of the school community or general public about appropriate matters relevant to the running of the school. This procedure is to be used only when informal attempts at a resolution have been unsuccessful.

2. Framework of Principles

This procedure is designed to:

- be well publicised and easily accessible
- be simple to understand and use
- be impartial
- be non-adversarial
- allow swift handling with established time limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress
- ensure a fair investigation by an independent person, where necessary
- allow for a hearing of a panel of Governors, where appropriate
- respect people's desire for confidentiality, wherever possible
- address all points of issue; provide an effective response and appropriate redress where necessary
- provide information to the school's Senior Management Team so that services can be improved.

3. Making a Formal Complaint

a. Stage 1

Where informal attempts have been unsuccessful in resolving a complaint, the matter will be formally investigated by an appropriate person from the school. If the matter is about the day-to-day running of the school or the interpretation of school policies, by members of staff of the school or the actions or inactions of staff at the school, the matter should be investigated by the headteacher or a member of senior staff nominated by the headteacher. If the matter is about school policies as determined by the Governing Body or the actions or inactions of the Governing Body, then the matter should be dealt with by the Chair of Governors or Governor nominated by the Chair.

A complainant wishing to instigate the formal procedure should be asked to complete a complaint form; the school should offer to help an individual to complete the form and the person providing this help should be unconnected with the complaint. It is essential to report the progress of any complaint and the final outcome. It is



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necessary that at each stage, the person investigating the complaint (the designated person) makes sure that they:

- establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved
- clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved
- meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary)
- clarify what the complainant feels would put things right
- Interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of the interview.

b. Resolving the Complaint

At each stage in the procedure, schools will want to keep in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- an apology
- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

It would be useful if complainants were encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence. Equally, an effective procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

If the school rejects the complaint, it is important to re-assure the complainant that the matter has been thoroughly investigated.



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4. Stage 2

Where the complainant is still not satisfied that their complaint has been dealt with fully and properly, they may choose to take it to a second stage. This stage will be referred to a panel of Governors established as outlined in Annex 2.

The Chair of the Panel will be elected by the Panel members and will be responsible for maintaining a further procedure as outlined in Annex 2.

a. Timescale

Complaints need to be considered and resolved, as quickly and efficiently as possible. An effective complaints procedure must have realistic time limits for each action within each stage. However, where further investigations are necessary, new time limits can be set and the complainant sent details of the new deadline and an explanation for the delay.

b. Mediation

If, at any time, throughout the procedure from informal to the final decision of the Panel, the school feels that external mediation would help resolve the complaint, they can access consultancy advice with the School Development Service (SDS). This procedure can only be used with the agreement of the complainant.

c. Monitoring Complaints

As well as addressing an individual's complaint, the process of listening to and resolving complaints would contribute to school improvements. When individual complaints are heard, schools may identify issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and Governing Body can be useful to evaluating the school's performance. Any discussion of complaints by the Governing Body or others in the school community should not name or be able to identify individuals.

d. Establishing a complaints panel

- The governing body should agree the composition of the complaints appeals panel at the first meeting of the governing body each year.
- As governors may not be available at all times it may be wise to agree the names of 4 or 5 possible governors from whom a panel of three may be drawn.
- When the clerk of governors receives a copy of the complaint form he/she will inform the governing body that a complaint has been received and that it has been passed to the panel to deal with. No further information about the complaint should be shared with other governors.



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- If for any reason this procedure cannot be followed: The governing Body in will put in place an alternative fair process.

e. There are several points which any governor sitting on a complaints panel needs to remember:

- It is important that the appeal hearing is independent and impartial and that it is seen to be so. No governor may sit on the panel if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it. In deciding the make-up of the panel, governors need to try and ensure that it is a cross-section of the categories of governor
- The aim of the hearing, which needs to be held in private, will always be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant
- The panel chair will ensure that the proceedings are as welcoming as possible. The layout of the room will set the tone and care is needed to ensure the setting is informal and not adversarial
- Extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child. Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings will ensure that the child is accompanied and does not feel intimidated. The panel needs to be aware of the views of the child and give them equal consideration to those of adults.
- The governors sitting on the panel need to be aware of the complaints procedure.

f. The Remit of the Complaints Appeal Panel

The panel needs to firstly consider whether the appeal is

- in relation to a decision taken by the Headteacher or a member of the school staff, or
- whether it is about the way in which a complaint or concern was handled.

If the complaint was in relation to a decision taken by the head, the panel will need to clarify whether it was

- a decision within the head teacher's professional responsibility, (A) or
- an area where the governing body has responsibility, or shares responsibility but have delegated this to the Headteacher (B)

If the complaint relates to (A) the panel can;

- consider the manner in which the complaint was addressed but not consider an alternative outcome
- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

If the complaint relates to (B) the panel can;

- dismiss the complaint in whole, or in part



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- uphold the complaint in whole, or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- recommend changes to the school's systems, or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

5. Checklist for a Panel Hearing

The panel needs to take the following points into account:

- The hearing is as informal as possible
- 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 or designated person may question both the complainant and the witnesses after each has spoken
- The Headteacher or designated person is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses
- The complainant may question both the Headteacher or designated person 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 or designated person 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 five working days

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6. Complaints Form

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

Name	
Address	
Postcode	
Telephone number/s	
email	
Your relationship to the school, e.g. parent, carer, neighbour, member of public	
Name of child/ren at school (if applicable)	
Year group and form	



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Please give details of 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?)



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

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