



**Watford Grammar School for Girls**

## **Complaints Policy**

<b>First Date of Issue</b>	<b>December 2017</b>
<b>Reviewed on</b>	<b>February 2018</b>
<b>This version adopted by Board of Governors</b>	<b>19.03.18</b>
<b>Next review date</b>	<b>01.03.21</b>
<b>Committee Responsible</b>	<b>Personnel</b>
<b>In school Policy</b>	

## **1. Aims of the Policy**

The School Complaints Procedure sets out to ensure that:

- the School listens and acts on complaints
- all complaints are investigated thoroughly, fairly and promptly
- wherever possible, the School will find a resolution
- complainants will not suffer as a result of a complaint.

This procedure is not intended to replace the normal discussions regarding problems and concerns which take place in school on a day-to-day basis. It is only where the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome of such discussions that further steps may need to be taken. This procedure applies to all staff.

Whenever possible we will try to deal with concerns without the need for formal procedures i.e. informally. In most cases the class teacher, Head of Department or Head of Year will receive the first approach. It would be helpful if staff were able to resolve issues on the spot, including apologising where necessary.

This procedure does not apply to issues concerning Admissions; Exclusions; Special Educational Provision; School reorganisation; Curriculum (including public examinations, school records on individual pupils, etc.); Grievances by Staff or Child Abuse. These matters are already provided for by existing statutory procedures, copies of which can be obtained from the School.

## **2. Formal procedures**

The formal procedures will need to be invoked when initial attempts to resolve the issue are unsuccessful and the person raising the concern remains dissatisfied and wishes to take the matter further.

The Headmistress will have responsibility for the operation and management of the school complaints procedure. If the complaint is about the Headmistress this will be dealt with by a nominated member of the Board of Governors.

## **3. Framework of Principles**

The Complaints Procedure will:

- encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- be easily accessible and publicised;
- be simple to understand and use;
- be impartial and non-adversarial;
- allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keep people informed of the progress;
- ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- address all the points at issue, provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;

- provide information to the school's senior leadership team so that services can be improved.

### **Stage 1 Informal**

The school will take informal concerns seriously and make every effort to resolve the matter quickly. It may be a case that the provision or clarification of information will resolve the issue.

The complainant should raise the complaint as soon as possible with the relevant member of staff or the Headmistress, by email or telephone. If in person, then an appointment should be made first.

The school will acknowledge informal complaints within 3 school days, the member of staff should set out the time period in which a response should be received by the complainant, ideally within 7 school days.

The member of staff investigating the complaint should inform the relevant Line Manager.

At each stage in the procedure we 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;
- an agreement to differ.

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.

Areas of agreement between the parties will be identified. It is also of equal 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 complaint is not resolved informally, it may be escalated to a formal complaint.

## **Stage 2 Formal Complaint**

A formal complaint should be made in writing either through a letter or using the form in Appendix 1, usually to the Headmistress<sup>1</sup>. The letter should provide details such as relevant dates, times and the names of witnesses of events, alongside copies of any relevant documents. The complainant should also state what they feel would resolve the complaint.

The Headmistress (or person appointed by the Headmistress) will conduct their own investigation. The outcome of the investigation should be communicated either through a meeting and / or in writing within 10 school days of receiving the complaint

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<sup>1</sup> Any complaints sent directly to the Chair of Governors will be redirected the Headmistress unless it is about her. If so, then see Page 5.

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response and wishes to proceed to the next stage of this procedure, they should inform the Chair of Governors in writing within 10 school days.

### **Stage 3 Review Panel**

If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the investigator, she/he may request that the complaint be considered by the Complaints Panel of the Governing Body which will comprise a minimum of 3 people, at least 2 of which will be Governors and which will include one person who is independent of the management and running of the school. Members of the Panel will be appointed on the basis that they have no prior knowledge of the complaint. The request must be in writing, addressed to the Clerk to the Governors at the school, within 10 school days of the response from stage 2 being sent to the complainant and must set out briefly the reasons why the complainant is dissatisfied with the response.

A letter of acknowledgement will be sent to the complainant within 5 school days. Within 15 school days of receipt of the complainant's letter the Clerk will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel of the Governing Body together with the complainant and relevant representatives of the school. That meeting will be held as quickly as practicable given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the school and the members of the Panel. At any meeting, the complainant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend but legal representation will not be allowed.

The meeting is not a court case and will be as informal as circumstances allow. The complainant will have the opportunity to put her/his reasons for dissatisfaction and to enlarge on them but may not introduce reasons that were not previously put in writing. The school will have the opportunity to put its case. The panel may ask questions of both the complainant and the school. The complainant and the school will have the opportunity to make final comments to the Panel.

The complainant and school staff should remain respectful to all throughout and verbal or physical threats will not be tolerated. The Chair may decide to end the meeting if there is a risk of continued abuse.

See Appendix 2 for the Procedure of the Complaints Panel.

The panel can:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part;
- 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.

The Panel will make findings and recommendations and 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 available for inspection on the school premises by the Trustees and the Headmistress.

The Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within 10 school days, and the Clerk to the Governors will notify all concerned of the decision.

If a complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of Governors may write to the complainant to inform him/her that the procedure has been completed and the matter closed.

A written record will be kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing

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 162A of the Education Act 2002 requests access to them.

The decision of the panel is final. If the complainant still not satisfied, they may wish to put their complaint to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills.

#### **4. Complaints against the Headmistress or a governor**

Complaints made against the Headmistress should be directed to the Chair of Governors.

Where a complaint is against the Chair of Governors or any member of the governing board, it should be made in writing to the clerk of the governing board in the first instance.

#### **5. Monitoring and Review**

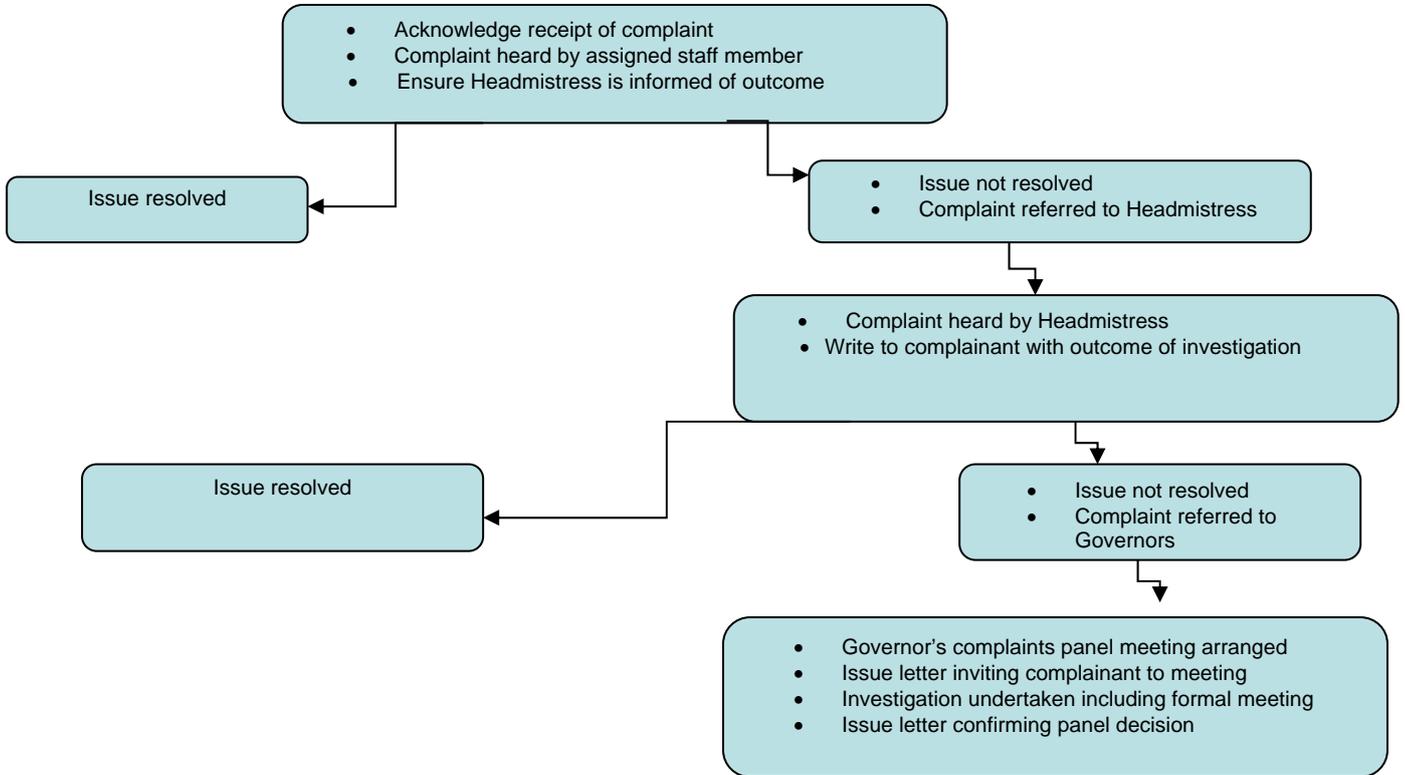
The Governing Body monitors the Complaints Procedure, in order to ensure that all complaints are handled properly. The Headmistress will log all formal complaints received by the School and record how they were resolved. Governors will examine this log on an annual basis and consider the need for any changes to the procedure.

#### **Availability**

A copy of this procedure is available to all parents or carers and members of the public on request and is published on the school's website.

# Flowchart

## Summary of Dealing with Complaints initially addressed to the Headmistress





Appendix 1

**Watford Grammar School for Girls  
Complaint Form**

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

Your name:

Pupil's name:

Your relationship to the pupil:

Address:

Postcode:

Day time telephone number:

Evening 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 who:**

**Complaint referred to:**

**Date:**

**All serious complaints should in the first instance be referred to the Headmistress.**

## Appendix 2: Procedure 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 the complaint, and be followed by their witnesses.
- The Headmistress is then invited to explain the school's actions and be followed by the school's witnesses.
- The panel may ask questions at any point.
- The complainant is then invited to sum up the complaint.
- The Headmistress 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.
- The Panel will formulate its response as quickly as reasonably possible, aiming to do so within 10 school days, and the Clerk to the Governors will notify all concerned of the decision.