



Wimbledon College

Complaints Procedure

1. Every so often situations arise where something has, or seems to have, gone wrong. The school welcomes communication from parents and is committed to sorting out any problems to everyone's satisfaction. We are not too proud to make an apology when one is due. Successful education relies on trust and co-operative relations between home and school. The manner in which problems are resolved makes all the difference.

Before a concern becomes a complaint

2. Do not hesitate to contact the school if you are uneasy or dissatisfied about something. It is important not to let little concerns build up into serious mistrust or irritation. We are as keen to see things run smoothly as you are - after all, we all want the best for the children.

3. When you contact the school, begin as informally as possible - say what concerns you and try to find out the facts. You will be in a much better position to know if you have grounds for a complaint when you are in possession of all the facts. We may be able to give an explanation or fill in details which answer your concerns. Do not rely solely on your child's account or on information from other parents.

4. A 'phone call is better than a letter, and a temperate letter is better than an ultimatum or threat of action. We welcome 'phone calls or personal visits from parents who wish to talk about a concern before it becomes a complaint.

What is a complaint?

5. It is worth thinking clearly about what it is that you wish to complain about:

- Is it a decision someone has taken in regard to your son?
- Is it someone's actions or words which you do not think are acceptable?
- Is it a matter of bias, unfair or unequal treatment?
- Is it a school policy or practice with which you disagree?
- Are you asking for your son to be exempted from some rule, requirement or expectation?

6. You should also consider and be clear what you are seeking as an outcome of your complaint:

- Do you want an explanation or justification?
- Do you want an apology?
- Do you want a decision changed?
- Do you want a policy or practice reconsidered by those responsible for running the school?
- If your son is involved in the complaint, how do you want him involved in its resolution?

7. Where your complaint is about a wider policy or practice in the school, it will be discussed by School Leadership Team and possibly by the Governors.

The school's expectation of parents

8. The school seeks to build a partnership with parents in the education of their children. This *Complaints Procedure* sets out how the school will deal with your concerns. For your part, we would ask that you:

- Don't believe everything you hear, even from your own children - things are often not entirely the way they are reported (by children or by other parents); children very much see things from their own point of view and important elements, circumstances and nuances of the story are often omitted in the version told to parents; it is always as well to find out the full story before charging in with a complaint.
- Find out what your child is like in school - you may be surprised; children in school can be very different people from the way they are at home - sometimes for better and sometimes for worse.
- Trust the school to resolve matters according to the aims and methods stated in this procedure.
- Seek information from the school where you need it.
- Consider what the school has to say.
- Disclose full and frank information which would help the school to resolve situations with integrity and justice.
- Take seriously and report without delay any concerns or suspicions of bullying.
- Do not involve your son inappropriately in your complaint - it is important that he sees parents and school working together to resolve differences or difficulties; he should not be placed in a position where he appears impertinent, insolent, disobedient or acts inappropriately; remember that directly countermanding a teacher's instruction or requirement is likely to make matters worse and bring confrontation rather than resolution.

9. When presenting a complaint to the school, parents often claim that "many parents feel this way" – such claims are very difficult for the school to deal with – if there are other parents who feel the same way as you on an important issue, please ask them to contact the school or allow you to name them so the school can talk to them also.

What you can expect of the school

10. You can expect your complaint to be recorded, to be taken seriously and to be thoroughly investigated.
11. If you write, email or leave a message, you can usually expect the school to get back to you within 48-hours (on a school day in term time) - this may not be a full response but will let you know that your complaint has been received and is being dealt with. The ends of terms are very busy and it may take longer to respond at those times.
12. You can expect staff to be friendly, courteous and supportive.
13. You can expect staff to be professional. This may sometimes mean we do not agree with you and must put forward a view or make a decision that you may not like - but we will always explain our reasons.
14. One member of staff will take lead responsibility for dealing with your complaint. You will be told who that person is and how to contact him or her.
15. Your son will be involved only if the complaint directly and personally concerns him. Parents are sometimes worried that if they complain there will be adverse consequences for their child. The College is firmly committed to ensuring that this is never the case.
16. You can expect a face-to-face meeting at any reasonable time and usually within five school days if you request it.
17. You can expect members of staff to treat the complaint with appropriate confidentiality.

Making a complaint – contacting the school

18. Talk to the right person. It may be tempting to go “straight to the top” but putting the problem to the Head Master often escalates something that could have been better resolved at a lower level. The Head Master will pass your complaint to the person most appropriately placed to deal with it.
19. Your first approach will normally be your son's Head of Line. The Head of Line has immediate day-to-day responsibility for your child's studies, pastoral care, discipline and involvement in school life. In most cases it is they who will be best informed about your child and will be best placed to resolve problems.
20. The Head of Line will involve other senior members of staff (such as Heads of Department or Heads of Faculty) as appropriate.
21. The Head of Line may pass more serious or complex problems to the Deputy Head to deal with. You will be kept informed of who is dealing with your complaint.
22. You are asked not to contact individual class or subject teachers directly.

23. You are asked not to make send multiple copies of letters or emails to various people either within or outside the school. Please make your complaint to one person and allow that person to deal with it according to the procedure set out in this policy.

Taking the matter further

24. If you are dissatisfied with the response you have received, or with the resolution of a matter, or if you wish to appeal against a decision, please write directly to the Head Master.

25. The Head Master will investigate any complaint (or appoint someone to do so) and hear any appeals brought by parents.

26. After a reasonable time to investigate your complaint, the Head Master (or the person he delegates, usually a Deputy Head) will offer to meet you to discuss the outcome of your appeal.

Complaint against the Head Master

27. If your complaint is about the Head Master you should raise your complaint with the Chair of Governors.

28. The Chair of Governors will either deal with your complaint himself or appoint another governor to do so.

Appealing to the Governors

29. In most cases, complaints will be resolved by senior staff. Appeals against the decisions of senior staff will usually be heard by the Head Master. In some situations, however, parents may feel their complaint has still not been satisfactorily resolved and may wish to appeal to the Governors.

30. In the first instance, a written complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors.

31. The Chair of Governors will decide whether or not the Governing Body wishes to consider the complaint or whether he feels the complaint has been adequately dealt with by senior staff or the Head Master. If a complaint has been made and dealt with and followed by an appeal to the Head Master, the Chair may decide that the Governors will not hear a further complaint.

32. The Chair of Governors may investigate the complaint (or appoint someone to do so) and make such arrangements to resolve the matter as he can.

33. If the Chair of Governors is unable to resolve the complaint he may decide to refer it to the Governors' Conciliation Committee.

34. The Chair of Governors will ask three governors to constitute a Conciliation Committee to consider the appeal, one of whom will act as convenor and chair the committee.
35. You will be invited to a meeting with the Conciliation Committee and may submit papers to be read in preparation.
36. The Head Master and the senior member of staff who has been involved in your complaint will be invited to attend and to speak.
37. The aim of the Conciliation Committee is to reach a constructive conclusion.
38. At the meeting of the Conciliation Committee, you will be asked to explain your complaint or appeal. The Head Master (or other senior member of staff) may then ask questions, as may Governors. Then the Head Master may make a response and you, and Governors, may ask questions. The Chair of the Committee may then allow some free discussion. The aim of this discussion is to arrive at a resolution.
39. If a resolution is not forthcoming, the Head Master will then be asked to summarise the school's view and you will be asked to summarise your own view. The Governors will then consider the appeal privately. Any decision or recommendation they make will be communicated to you within two days.
40. The Governors will not usually enter into any further discussion of the matter.

Support

41. At any stage of the complaints procedure, parents are welcome to bring with them a supportive friend who is not involved in the complaint.
42. Within the complaints procedure it is not appropriate for the school to engage in meetings to which parents bring legal representatives or advisors.
43. The school will not generally enter into correspondence with solicitors or others in place of direct communication with parents.

Admissions

44. Appeals on matters of admissions to the school are heard by an independent appeals panel as laid down in legislation.

Appeals against punishment

45. The school has a procedure whereby pupils may appeal against punishments they feel are unfair or disproportionate. The details of the appeal procedure are published in the online *School Handbook* and pupil *Homework Diary*. Parents are asked to allow this

procedure to operate before becoming involved in an appeal against a disciplinary action.

Exclusion

46. Appeals against exclusions are governed by statutory arrangements. Parents may appeal first to a Discipline Committee of the Governing Body and then to an independent exclusion appeals panel.

Complaints from people who are not parents

47. From time to time, complaints are received from people who are not parents of pupils at Wimbledon College. Such complaints will usually be responded to by the Head Master or a Deputy Head.

48. There is no right of appeal beyond any explanation, action or apology offered.

Anonymous complaints

49. Anonymous complaints are unhelpful and will not usually be acted upon.

Appendix

This appendix seeks to explain some of the terms used in this procedure.

Trustees

Wimbledon College is owned and operated as a voluntary aided school by the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). The Jesuits are the Trustees of the school. Wimbledon College is not a Diocesan school.

Governors

The Governing Body is the statutory admissions authority for the school. It sets the admissions policy and makes admissions decisions according to that policy.

The Governing Body (not the Local Authority) is the employer of teachers and support staff in the school.

The Governing Body determines the policies and some of the more important procedures by which the school operates. It oversees the work of the Head Master and the School Leadership Team.

School Leadership Team

The School Leadership Team (SLT) consists of the Head Master, Deputy Heads and other senior members of staff who have responsibility for pastoral care and teaching and learning. The School Leadership Team determines the day-to-day arrangements for the running of the school, guided by the policies set down by the Governors.

Local Authority

The Local Authority for Wimbledon College is the London Borough of Merton. The Local Authority has certain statutory responsibilities with regard to all maintained schools within its boundaries. However, Wimbledon College is a voluntary aided school and, as such, has significant autonomy from the Local Authority. It is not a Community school.

Head of Line

Line is the term used in Jesuit schools to mean a year group. The Lines have traditional names: Figures (Y7), Rudiments (Y8), Lower Grammar (Y9), Grammar (Y10), Syntax (Y11), Poetry (Y12) and Rhetoric (Y13). The pastoral Head of Year is known as the Head of Line.

Wimbledon College
Approved by the Governing Body on 15th March 2006