



Wimbledon College

Complaints Procedure

Agreed by the Governing Body June 2024

Complaints Procedure

This procedure is in accordance with Section 29(1) of the Education Act 2002. 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.

What is a complaint?

Definitions

A concern may be defined as *'an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought'*.

A complaint may be defined as *'an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action'*.

Before a concern becomes a complaint

It is in everyone's interest that concerns and complaints are resolved at the earliest possible stage. Many issues can be resolved informally, without the need to use the formal stages of the complaints procedure. Wimbledon College takes concerns seriously and will make every effort to resolve the matter as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In these cases the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

We understand however, that there are occasions when people would like to raise their concerns formally. In this case, Wimbledon College will attempt to resolve the issue internally, through the stages outlined within this complaints procedure.

How to raise a concern or make a complaint

A concern or complaint can be made in person, in writing or by telephone. They may also be made by a third party acting on behalf on a complainant, as long as they have appropriate consent to do so.

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 child?
- 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 child to be exempted from some rule, requirement or expectation?

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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 child is involved in the complaint, how do you want him involved in its resolution?

Who can raise a concern or make a complaint?

This complaints procedure is not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint to Wimbledon College about any provision of facilities or services that we provide. Unless complaints are dealt with under separate procedures (such as appeals relating to exclusions or admissions), we will use this complaints procedure.

The school's expectation of parents

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 child inappropriately in your complaint - it is important that they see the parents and school working together to resolve differences or difficulties; they should not be placed in a position where they appear 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.

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

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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

You can expect your concern or complaint to be recorded, to be taken seriously and to be thoroughly investigated.

If you write, email or leave a message, you can usually expect the school to get back to you within two working days (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.

You can expect staff to be friendly, courteous and supportive.

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.

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.

If you have difficulty discussing a concern with a particular member of staff, we will respect your views. In this situation the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Headteacher will refer you to another staff member. The member of staff may be more senior but does not have to be. The ability to consider the concern objectively and impartially is more important.

Your child will be involved only if the complaint directly and personally concerns them. 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.

You can expect a face-to-face meeting at any reasonable time and usually within five school days if you request it.

You can expect members of staff to treat the complaint with appropriate confidentiality.

Contacting the school

Talk to the right person. It may be tempting to go "straight to the top" but putting the problem to the Headteacher often escalates something that could have been better resolved at a lower level. The Headteacher will pass your concern to the person most appropriately placed to deal with it.

Your first approach will normally be your child's Head of Line. The Head of Line has immediate day-to-day responsibility for your child's studies, pastoral care, discipline and

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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.

The Head of Line will involve other senior members of staff (such as Heads of Department or Heads of Faculty) as appropriate. 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.

You are asked not to contact individual class or subject teachers directly.

You are asked not to 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.

Complainants should not approach individual governors to raise concerns or complaints. They have no power to act on an individual basis and it may also prevent them from considering complaints as part of our appeal process.

Complaints against school staff (except the Headteacher) should be made in the first instance to the Headteacher. This should be done in person, in writing or by telephone. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Complaints that involve or are about the Headteacher should be addressed to the Chair of Governors, via the Clerk to Governors, at the school. Please mark them as Private and Confidential. The Chair of Governors will either deal with your complaint himself or appoint another governor to do so.

Complaints about the Chair of Governors, any individual governor or the whole governing body should be addressed to the Clerk to the Governing Body via the school office. Please mark them as Private and Confidential.

Support

At any stage of the complaints procedure, the complainant is welcome to bring with them a supportive friend who is not involved in the complaint.

Within the complaints procedure it is not appropriate for the school to engage in meetings to which parents bring legal representatives or advisors.

The school will not generally enter into correspondence with solicitors or others in place of direct communication with parents.

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Scope of the Complaints Procedure

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by Wimbledon College, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, including those listed below.

Exceptions	Who to contact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admissions to schools 	<p>Appeals on matters of admissions to the school are heard by an independent appeals panel as laid down in legislation</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs • School re-organisation proposals 	<p>Concerns about statutory assessments of Special Educational Needs, or school re-organisation proposals should be raised with The London Borough of Merton</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matters likely to require a Child Protection Investigation 	<p>Complaints about child protection matters are handled under our child protection and safeguarding policy and in accordance with relevant statutory guidance.</p> <p>If you have serious concerns, you may wish to contact the local authority designated officer (LADO) who has local responsibility for safeguarding or the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).</p> <p>LADO: lado@merton.gov.uk ; 020 8545 3187</p> <p>MASH: mash@merton.gov.uk ; 020 8545 4226</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exclusion of children from school* 	<p>Further information about raising concerns about exclusion can be found at: www.gov.uk/school-discipline-exclusions/exclusions.</p> <p><i>*complaints about the application of the behaviour policy can be made through the school's complaints procedure.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing 	<p>We have an internal whistleblowing procedure for all our employees, including temporary staff and contractors.</p> <p>The Secretary of State for Education is the prescribed person for matters relating to education for whistleblowers in education who do not want to raise matters direct with their employer. Referrals can be made at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus.</p> <p>Volunteer staff who have concerns about our school should complain through the school's complaints procedure. You may also be able to complain direct to the LA or the Department for Education (see link above),</p>

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	depending on the substance of your complaint.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff grievances 	Complaints from staff will be dealt with under the school's internal grievance procedures.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff conduct 	<p>Complaints about staff will be dealt with under the school's internal disciplinary procedures, if appropriate.</p> <p>Complainants will not be informed of any disciplinary action taken against a staff member as a result of a complaint. However, the complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about services provided by other providers who may use school premises or facilities 	Providers should have their own complaints procedure to deal with complaints about service. Please contact them direct.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Curriculum - content 	Please contact the Department for Education at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

If other bodies are investigating aspects of the complaint, for example the police, local authority (LA) safeguarding teams or Tribunals, this may impact on our ability to adhere to the timescales within this procedure or result in the procedure being suspended until those public bodies have completed their investigations.

If a complainant commences legal action against Wimbledon College in relation to their complaint, we will consider whether to suspend the complaints procedure in relation to their complaint until those legal proceedings have concluded.

Anonymous complaints

Anonymous complaints are unhelpful and will not usually be acted upon. However, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors, if appropriate, will determine whether the complaint warrants an investigation.

[Please be aware that parents are sometimes worried that if they identify themselves there will be adverse consequences for their child. The College is firmly committed to ensuring that this is never the case.]

Time scales

You must raise the complaint within three months of the incident or, where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. We will consider complaints made outside of this time frame if exceptional circumstances apply.

Complaints received outside of term time

We will consider complaints made outside of term time to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

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Resolving complaints

At each stage in the procedure, Wimbledon College wants to resolve the complaint. If appropriate, we will acknowledge that the complaint is upheld in whole or in part. In addition, we may offer one or more of the following:

- an explanation
- an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better
- an assurance that we will try to ensure the event complained of will not recur
- an explanation of the steps that have been or will be taken to help ensure that it will not happen again and an indication of the timescales within which any changes will be made
- an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint
- an apology.

Withdrawal of a Complaint

If a complainant wants to withdraw their complaint, we will ask them to confirm this in writing.

Formal Process for complaints

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Headteacher (unless they are about the Headteacher), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing, or by telephone. The Headteacher will record the date the complaint is received and will acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within two school days.

Within this response, the Headteacher will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Headteacher can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this.

Note: The Headteacher may delegate the investigation to another member of the school's senior leadership team but not the decision to be taken.

During the investigation, the Headteacher (or investigator) will:

- if necessary, interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish
- keep a written record of any meetings/interviews in relation to their investigation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be dealt with under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under the staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them. The complainant will be notified that the matter is being addressed.

At the conclusion of their investigation, the Headteacher will provide a formal written response within 20 school days of the date of receipt of the complaint. If the Headteacher is unable to meet

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this deadline, they will provide the complainant with an update and revised response date.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Wimbledon College will take to resolve the complaint. The Headteacher will advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied with the outcome of Stage 1.

If the complaint is about the Headteacher, or a member of the governing body (including the Chair or Vice-Chair), a suitably skilled governor will be appointed to complete all the actions at Stage 1.

Complaints about the Headteacher or member of the governing body must be made to the Clerk, via the school office.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body or Trustees. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Stage 2

If the complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome at Stage 1 and wishes to take the matter further, they can escalate the complaint to Stage 2 – a meeting with members of the governing body's complaints committee, which will be formed of the first three, impartial, governors available. This is the final stage of the complaints procedure.

A request to escalate to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk, via the school office, within ten school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

The Clerk will record the date the complaint is received and acknowledge receipt of the complaint in writing (either by letter or email) within two school days.

The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the date of the meeting. They will aim to convene a meeting within 15 school days of receipt of the Stage 2 request. If this is not possible, the Clerk will provide an anticipated date and keep the complainant informed.

If the complainant rejects the offer of three proposed dates, without good reason, the Clerk will decide when to hold the meeting. It will then proceed in the complainant's absence on the basis of written submissions from both parties.

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The complaints committee will consist of at least three governors with no prior involvement or knowledge of the complaint. Prior to the meeting, they will decide amongst themselves who will act as the Chair of the Complaints Committee. If there are fewer than three governors from Wimbledon College available, the Clerk will source any additional, independent governors through another local school or through their LA's Governor Services team, in order to make up the committee. Alternatively, an entirely independent committee may be convened to hear the complaint at Stage 2.

The committee will decide whether to deal with the complaint by inviting parties to a meeting or through written representations, but in making their decision they will be sensitive to the complainant's needs.

If the complainant is invited to attend the meeting, they may bring someone along to provide support. This can be a relative or friend. Generally, we do not encourage either party to bring legal representatives to the committee meeting. However, there may be occasions when legal representation is appropriate.

For instance, if a school employee is called as a witness in a complaint meeting, they may wish to be supported by union and/or legal representation.

Note: Complaints about staff conduct will not generally be handled under this complaints procedure. Complainants will be advised that any staff conduct complaints will be considered under staff disciplinary procedures, if appropriate, but outcomes will not be shared with them.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend.

At least 10 school days before the meeting, the Clerk will:

- confirm and notify the complainant of the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that, if the complainant is invited, the dates are convenient to all parties and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- request copies of any further written material to be submitted to the committee at least 5 school days before the meeting.

Any written material will be circulated to all parties at least 3 school days before the date of the meeting. The committee will not normally accept, as evidence, recordings of conversations that were obtained covertly and without the informed consent of all parties being recorded.

The committee will also not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint to be included. New complaints must be dealt with from Stage 1 of the procedure.

The meeting will be held in private. Electronic recordings of meetings or conversations are not normally permitted unless a complainant's own disability or special needs require it. Prior knowledge and consent of all parties attending must be sought before meetings or conversations take place. Consent will be recorded in any minutes taken.

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The committee will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented. The committee can:

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

If the complaint is upheld in whole or in part, the committee will:

- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint
- where appropriate, recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

The Chair of the Committee will provide the complainant and Wimbledon College with a full explanation of their decision and the reason(s) for it, in writing, within 5 school days.

The letter to the complainant will include details of how to contact the Department for Education if they are dissatisfied with the way their complaint has been handled by Wimbledon College.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 2 will be heard by a committee of independent, co-opted governors.

The response will detail any actions taken to investigate the complaint and provide a full explanation of the decision made and the reason(s) for it. Where appropriate, it will include details of actions Wimbledon College will take to resolve the complaint.

The response will also advise the complainant of how to escalate their complaint should they remain dissatisfied.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by Wimbledon College. They will consider whether Wimbledon College has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

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Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

Next review date: June 2025

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Complaint Form

Please complete and return to Wimbledon College (*either headteacher / Clerk / complaints co-ordinator / designated governor – school to delete as appropriate*) who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

Your name:
Pupil's name (if relevant):
Your relationship to the pupil (if relevant):
Address: Postcode: Day time telephone number: Evening telephone number:
Please give details of your complaint, including whether you have spoken to anybody at the school about it.

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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.

Signature:

Date:

Official use

Date acknowledgement sent:

By who:

Complaint referred to:

Date:

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Appendix

This appendix seeks to explain some of the terms and roles 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 Headteacher and the School Leadership Team.

School Leadership Team

The School Leadership Team (SLT) consists of the Headteacher, 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.

Roles and Responsibilities

Complainant

The complainant will receive a more effective response to the complaint if they:

- explain the complaint in full as early as possible
- co-operate with the school in seeking a solution to the complaint
- respond promptly to requests for information or meetings or in agreeing the details of the complaint
- ask for assistance as needed
- treat all those involved in the complaint with respect

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- refrain from publicising the details of their complaint on social media and respect confidentiality.

Investigator

The investigator's role is to establish the facts relevant to the complaint by:

- providing a comprehensive, open, transparent and fair consideration of the complaint through:
 - sensitive and thorough interviewing of the complainant to establish what has happened and who has been involved
 - interviewing staff and children/young people and other people relevant to the complaint
 - consideration of records and other relevant information
 - analysing information
- liaising with the complainant and the complaints co-ordinator as appropriate to clarify what the complainant feels would put things right.

The investigator should:

- conduct interviews with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning
- keep notes of interviews or arrange for an independent note taker to record minutes of the meeting
- ensure that any papers produced during the investigation are kept securely pending any appeal
- be mindful of the timescales to respond
- prepare a comprehensive report for the headteacher or complaints committee that sets out the facts, identifies solutions and recommends courses of action to resolve problems.

The headteacher or complaints committee will then determine whether to uphold or dismiss the complaint and communicate that decision to the complainant, providing the appropriate escalation details.

Complaints Co-ordinator (this could be the headteacher / designated complaints governor or other staff member providing administrative support)

The complaints co-ordinator should:

- ensure that the complainant is fully updated at each stage of the procedure
- liaise with staff members, headteacher, Chair of Governors, Clerk and LAs (if appropriate) to ensure the smooth running of the complaints procedure
- be aware of issues regarding:

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- sharing third party information
- additional support. This may be needed by complainants when making a complaint including interpretation support or where the complainant is a child or young person
- keep records.

Clerk to the Governing Body

The Clerk is the contact point for the complainant and the committee and should:

- ensure that all people involved in the complaint procedure are aware of their legal rights and duties, including any under legislation relating to school complaints, education law, the Equality Act 2010, the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- set the date, time and venue of the meeting, ensuring that the dates are convenient to all parties (if they are invited to attend) and that the venue and proceedings are accessible
- collate any written material relevant to the complaint (for example; stage 1 paperwork, school and complainant submissions) and send it to the parties in advance of the meeting within an agreed timescale
- record the proceedings
- circulate the minutes of the meeting
- notify all parties of the committee's decision.

Committee Chair

The committee's chair, who is nominated in advance of the complaint meeting, should ensure that:

- both parties are asked (via the Clerk) to provide any additional information relating to the complaint by a specified date in advance of the meeting
 - the meeting is conducted in an informal manner, is not adversarial, and that, if all parties are invited to attend, everyone is treated with respect and courtesy
 - complainants who may not be used to speaking at such a meeting are put at ease. This is particularly important if the complainant is a child/young person
 - the remit of the committee is explained to the complainant
 - written material is seen by everyone in attendance, provided it does not breach confidentiality or any individual's rights to privacy under the DPA 2018 or GDPR.
- If a new issue arises it would be useful to give everyone the opportunity to consider and comment upon it; this may require a short adjournment of the meeting
- both the complainant and the school are given the opportunity to make their case and

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seek clarity, either through written submissions ahead of the meeting or verbally in the meeting itself

- the issues are addressed
- key findings of fact are made
- the committee is open-minded and acts independently
- no member of the committee has an external interest in the outcome of the proceedings or any involvement in an earlier stage of the procedure
- the meeting is minuted
- they liaise with the Clerk (and complaints co-ordinator, if the school has one).

Committee Member

Committee members should be aware that:

- the meeting must be independent and impartial, and should be seen to be so

No governor may sit on the committee if they have had a prior involvement in the complaint or in the circumstances surrounding it.

- the aim of the meeting should be to resolve the complaint and achieve reconciliation between the school and the complainant

We recognise that the complainant might not be satisfied with the outcome if the meeting does not find in their favour. It may only be possible to establish the facts and make recommendations.

- many complainants will feel nervous and inhibited in a formal setting

Parents/carers often feel emotional when discussing an issue that affects their child.

- extra care needs to be taken when the complainant is a child/young person and present during all or part of the meeting

Careful consideration of the atmosphere and proceedings should ensure that the child/young person does not feel intimidated.

The committee should respect the views of the child/young person and give them equal consideration to those of adults.

If the child/young person is the complainant, the committee should ask in advance if any support is needed to help them present their complaint. Where the child/young person's parent is the complainant, the committee should give the parent the opportunity to say which parts of the meeting, if any, the child/young person needs to attend.

However, the parent should be advised that agreement might not always be possible if the parent wishes the child/young person to attend a part of the meeting that the committee considers is not in the child/young person's best interests.

- the welfare of the child/young person is paramount.