



Wimbledon College

Complaints Procedure

Agreed by the Governing Body on June 2019

Reviewed by Cura Personalis Committee June 2021

Complaints Procedure

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

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.

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.

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.

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?

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'*.

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.

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?

Complaints Procedure

- Are you asking for your son to be exempted from some rule, requirement or expectation?

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?

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.

Who can 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 statutory 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 son inappropriately in your complaint - it is important that the 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

Complaints Procedure

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 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 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 these cases the Head Master will refer you to another staff member. Similarly, if the member of staff directly involved feels unable to deal with a concern, the Head Master 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 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.

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.

Making a complaint – contacting the school

Talk to the right person. It may be tempting to go "straight to the top" but putting the problem to

Complaints Procedure

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.

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.

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.

Complaints against school staff (except the Head Master) should be made in the first instance to the Head Master. 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 Head Master 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.

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.

Taking the matter further

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.

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

Complaints Procedure

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.

Appealing to the Governors

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.

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

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.

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.

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

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.

You will be invited to a meeting with the Conciliation Committee and may submit papers to be read in preparation.

The Head Master and the senior member of staff who has been involved in your complaint will be invited to attend and to speak.

The aim of the Conciliation Committee is to reach a constructive conclusion.

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.

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.

The Governors will not usually enter into any further discussion of the matter.

Complaints Procedure

Support

At any stage of the complaints procedure, parents are 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.

Admissions

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

Appeals against punishment

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 *Handbook*. Parents are asked to allow this procedure to operate before becoming involved in an appeal against a disciplinary action.

Anonymous complaints

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

All complaints are dealt with in line with the ethos of the school. No individual will be discriminated against if they or a member of their family make a complaint to the school.

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.

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:

Complaints Procedure

- 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.

Complaints Procedure

Formal Process for complaints against a member of staff

Stage 1

Formal complaints must be made to the Head Master (unless they are about the Head Master), via the school office. This may be done in person, in writing, or by telephone. The Head Master 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 Head Master will seek to clarify the nature of the complaint, ask what remains unresolved and what outcome the complainant would like to see. The Head Master can consider whether a face to face meeting is the most appropriate way of doing this. *Note: The Head Master 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 Head Master (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.

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

Complaints Procedure

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.

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. Requests received outside of this time frame will only be considered if exceptional circumstances apply.

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.

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.

Complaints Procedure

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.

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.

Complaints Procedure

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:

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

Next review date: June 2023

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.