



## Complaints Procedure (Whole School – including EYFS)

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<b>ISI Reg:</b>	Para 33; part 7 ISSR, EYFS 3 (EYFS 3.83); NMS Standard 14 & NMS App A
<b>Other related policies and documents:</b>	Behaviour, Rewards and Sanctions

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## **I. Introduction**

Woodbridge School (which includes the Senior and Prep Schools) has long prided itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils, and its communication with parents. However, if parents do have concerns, they can expect them to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this Complaints Procedure. Woodbridge School makes its Complaints Procedure available to all parents of pupils (boarding and day) and of prospective pupils on the School's website and in the School office during the school day, and Woodbridge School will ensure that parents of pupils and of prospective pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published or available and of the form in which it is published or available. This procedure is not, however, available for use by prospective parents – it may only be used by parents of current pupils.

Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this Complaints Procedure only if the complaint was initially raised when the pupil to which the complaint relates was still registered as a pupil at the School.

The School will be mindful of its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in the application of this policy.

In accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, **Woodbridge School will make available to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils and provide, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of the complaints procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.**

**“Parent(s)” means the holder(s) of parental responsibility for a current pupil (boarding and day) about whom the complaint relates.**

## **2. What Constitutes a Complaint?**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a real or perceived problem. It may be made about the School as a whole, about a specific department or about an individual member of staff, and any matter about which a parent is unhappy and seeks action by the School is within the scope of this procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, failed to do something that it should have done or has acted unfairly.

**Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them. There may also be other circumstances in which the School is required to share information relating to a concern or a complaint in order to comply with its legal or regulatory obligations.**

**The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you raise in good faith.**

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### 3. The three-stage Complaints Procedure

The Regulations require concerns to be addressed in three stages. It is important that complainants follow the three stages in raising concerns, and that both School and complainant are clear during the process at which stage they are working.

#### 3.1 Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally.
- If parents have a complaint they should normally contact their son/daughter's Tutor /Class Teacher. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Tutor /Class Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for him/her to consult a Head of Department/the Deputy Head.
- Complaints made directly to a Head of Department/the Deputy Head/the Head/the Head of Woodbridge School Prep will usually be referred to the relevant Tutor/ Class Teacher unless the Head of Department/Head of Year/ Deputy Head believes it appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.
- The Tutor/Class Teacher/Head of Department / Head of Year will make a written record of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. Should the matter not be resolved **within ten working days** or in the event that the Tutor/Head of Department / Head of Year/Class Teacher and the parent fail to reach a satisfactory resolution then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Complaints Procedure.
- If the complaint is against the Head of Woodbridge School Prep, parents should make their complaint directly to the Head.
- If, however, the complaint is against the Head, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors who can be contacted via the Clerk to the Governors by emailing [vsharratt@seckford-foundation.org.uk](mailto:vsharratt@seckford-foundation.org.uk)
- Although the School endeavours to manage complaints in an open and transparent manner, parents should be aware that there may be circumstances which mean the School is unable to share complete details about how a complaint has been handled by the School, the evidence collated, steps taken in response or other related matters. This could be the case even when a complaint is upheld. For example, this may be because such information constitutes sensitive third-party data (for example belonging to a staff member, pupil or other parent), legal or regulatory requirements prohibit disclosure, or withholding information is in accordance with specific instructions from a statutory agency. This list is not exhaustive.

### 3.2 Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Head/Head of Woodbridge School Prep. Parents are encouraged to complete the appended Complaint Form to proceed to Stage 2 although this is not mandatory. The Head/Head of Woodbridge School Prep may require further information from the parents to help clarify the scope and nature of their concerns. The Head / Head of Woodbridge School Prep will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.
- In most cases, the Head/Head of Woodbridge School Prep will speak to the parents concerned, within **ten working days** of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.
- It may be necessary for further investigations to be carried out. The Head /Head of Woodbridge School Prep will determine who should carry out any investigation and this may be someone external to the School.
- Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
- Once the Head/Head of Woodbridge School Prep is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head/Head of Woodbridge School Prep (or their nominee) will also give reasons for the decision. In most cases, the Head/Head of Woodbridge School Prep will make their decision and provide the parents with reasons within 20 working days of the complaint being put in writing (or following the provision of any further clarificatory information about the complaint to the Head/Head of Woodbridge School Prep (or their nominee), if so requested)
- If the complaint is against the Head of Woodbridge School Prep, the Head (or their nominee) will conduct a full investigation and once satisfied, so far as is practicable, that all of the relevant facts have been established, the Head will inform the parents of the decision in writing in accordance with the timescales set out above.
- If the complaint is against the Head, the complaint should be made to the Chair of Governors. The Chair of Governors will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The stage 2 process described above will then be followed as if the reference to the Head is to the individual nominated by the Chair of Governors to determine the complaint against the Head.
- If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

### 3.3 Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

- If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution (at Stage 2) they should do so in writing to the Clerk to the Panel within 10 working days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence which the parents wish to rely on should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. The Complaints Panel will not review any new complaints at this stage or consider evidence unrelated to the initial complaint. New complaints must be dealt with under an earlier stage of this policy.
- To the extent the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances which have impeded the parents from taking action, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such a request should be made to the Clerk to the Panel in advance of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this. This will be considered. In the event the parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated (including to the extent applicable any extensions if agreed) the School reserves the right to conclude the complaint process and not progress the matter to Stage 3.
- The Clerk to the Panel, who has been appointed by the Governors to call hearings of the Complaints Panel, will then refer the appeal to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The Panel will consist of three persons not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint, one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. The Clerk to the Panel will appoint one Panel member to act as Chair of the Panel. The Clerk to the Panel, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint within 5 working days and schedule a hearing to take place within 20 working days.
- If the Panel or Clerk to the Panel deems it necessary, they may require that further particulars of the complaint or any related matter be supplied in advance of the hearing or further investigation be carried out. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied to all parties **not later than 5 working days** prior to the hearing.
- **The parents may attend the hearing and be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish.** The Stage 2 decision taker shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. Legal representation will not be appropriate and the companion should not be a lawyer. The identity of the companions should be confirmed to the Clerk to the Panel as soon as possible and by no later than **2 working days** before the hearing. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.
- A note-taker will attend the hearing to take a note. This will not be a verbatim note but an accurate reflection of what was discussed. Notes of the hearing will be shared with attendees as soon as practicable after the hearing. To the extent there is any disagreement about the content of those notes or further comments from the

parties, these will be considered by and, where possible, resolved by the Chair. A copy of any comments on the notes will be appended to the notes.

- The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Chair of Governors and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- After due consideration of the complaint and all facts they consider relevant, **the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and decide whether to:**
  - dismiss the complaint (s) in whole or in part;
  - uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
  - make recommendations. Stage 3 panels cannot require that any financial compensation is paid to parents or otherwise obligate the School to take particular steps.
- The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, **within 7 working days of the hearing** (although additional time may be required if it is necessary to carry out further investigations following the hearing). The decision of the Panel will be final. **A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will be sent by electronic mail or otherwise given to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Chair of Governors and the Stage 2 decision taker. A copy of the Panel's findings and recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors and the Head.**

#### **4. Timeframe for Dealing with Complaints**

All complaints will be handled seriously and sensitively with clear and reasonable timescales.

It is in everyone's interest to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible: the School's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure **within 30 working days**. Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, will be completed **within a further 27 working days**.

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, **working days** refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays and half term. This means that during School holidays it may take longer to resolve a complaint although the school will do what is reasonably practicable to avoid undue delay. It may also take longer to resolve a complaint during periods of significant disruption to school life or as a consequence of unavoidable staff absence. However, deviation from the normal timescale for resolving a complaint during term time will only occur on an exceptional basis and the School will take all reasonable steps to limit any such delay. The School expects parents to engage in the

process in a reasonable, constructive and responsive manner to help ensure matters can be dealt with in a timely way and in line with the targets set out in this Procedure.

Where repeated attempts are made by parents to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this may be regarded by the school as vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

## **5. Recording Complaints and use of personal data**

**Following resolution of a complaint, the School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, whether they are resolved at the formal stage (Stage 2) or proceed to a panel hearing (Stage 3) and any action taken by the School as a result of the complaint (regardless of whether the complaint is upheld).**

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice [Privacy Policy - Woodbridge School](#) When dealing with complaints the School (including any panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent(s) and pupil(s)
- Description of the issue and completed complaint form
- Records of all the investigations (if appropriate)
- Pupil records (as appropriate)
- Witness statements (if appropriate)
- Name and contact details of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/minutes of meetings including the Panel hearing
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Privacy Notice, but potentially including, for instance information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy. All records relating to complaints shall be treated as confidential. In addition to where requested by the Secretary of State or an inspector (see above), there may be other

circumstances where disclosure of the substance of a complaint or particular confidential records relating to it is required, for example, where there is a legal, regulatory, safeguarding or data protection obligation (eg. in response to a subject access request) which prevails over the requirement to maintain the records as confidential.

**For the academic year 2024/2025 the School received 4 formal complaints.**

## **6. EYFS**

Parents of EYFS children should follow the three stages of this complaints policy. If parents remain dissatisfied and their complaint is about the School's fulfilment of the EYFS requirements, then parents may take their complaint to the ISI or Ofsted. The School will notify parents about the outcome of the investigation into their complaint within 28 days from the date the complaint was received.

**Woodbridge School will provide ISI/Ofsted, on request, with a written record of all complaints made during any specified period, and the action which was taken as a result of each complaint. The record of any such complaints will be kept in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy.**

**Parents may complain directly to Ofsted or to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements.**

**Ofsted can be contacted on 0300 123 1231 or by email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)**

**Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD**

**ISI can be contacted on 020 7600 0100 or by email: [info@isi.net](mailto:info@isi.net)**

**ISI, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA**

## **7. Compliance and Monitoring arrangements**

This policy will be subject to a thorough review process including consideration at the Compliance and Risk Committee and ratification by the Governing Body on an annual basis. This will ensure that practice across the whole school is in line with this policy, and with current guidance and legislation.



# Woodbridge School

## Complaint Form

Please read the School's Complaints Policy before completing this form. It provides information on when and how this form should be completed.

To be completed by those with parental responsibility<sup>1</sup> for a current pupil and returned to the Head via [snorman@woodbridgeschool.org.uk](mailto:snorman@woodbridgeschool.org.uk), or the Head of Woodbridge School Prep via [nmitchell@woodbridgeschool.org.uk](mailto:nmitchell@woodbridgeschool.org.uk).

If the complaint is against the Head return the form to the Chair of Governors via [vsharratt@seckford-foundation.org.uk](mailto:vsharratt@seckford-foundation.org.uk)

PLEASE USE BLOCK CAPITALS

<b>Your name(s)</b>	
<b>Name of pupil(s), year(s) and your relationship to them</b>	
<b>Contact address</b>	
<b>Contact telephone day</b>	
<b>Contact telephone mobile</b>	
<b>Contact email address</b>	
<b>Details of the complaint<sup>2</sup></b>	

<sup>1</sup> Parental responsibility is defined in the Children Act 1989 as "all rights, duties, powers and responsibilities and authority which by law a parent of a child has in relation to the child and his or her property". It equates to legal responsibility for the child. If you have any doubts about whether you do or do not have parental responsibility for the child you may wish to seek legal advice.

<sup>2</sup> Please provide details of the nature of your complaint. If you have more than one ground of complaint we suggest numbering them so that each is considered in turn. If you require more space you may wish to attach an additional page setting out your complaint.



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**Action taken to date (including staff member(s) who has/have dealt with it so far) and solutions offered**

**The reason(s) that this was not a satisfactory resolution for you**

**What action(s) would you like to be taken to resolve your complaint?**

**Signature(s):**

**School use**

**Stage in the complaints procedure (circle as appropriate):**    1        2        3

**Date acknowledgement sent:**

**By whom:**

**Complaint referred to:**

**Action taken:**

**Date:**



# Woodbridge School

## How we may use personal information

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice available at [Privacy Policy - Woodbridge School](#). When dealing with complaints the School (including any Panel members appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, which is likely to include:

- This completed complaint form
- Date when the issue was raised
- Name of parent(s) and pupil(s)
- Description of the issue
- Records of all the investigations
- Pupil records (as appropriate)
- Witness statements (as appropriate)
- Name and contact details of member(s) of staff handling the issue at each stage
- Copies of all correspondence on the issue (including emails and records of phone conversations)
- Notes/ minutes of meetings including the Panel hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision.

As part of the complaints process we may also process 'special category personal data' (as further detailed in the School's Privacy, but potentially including, for instance, information relating to physical or mental health) where this is necessary owing to the nature of the complaint. This data will be processed in accordance with the School's Data Protection Policy.

The School will keep records of formal complaints and Complaints Panel hearings, as required by regulation. It will do so in accordance with its Privacy Notice and Data Protection Policy.