Complaints Policy (A14)

Scope:	Whole School (including Boarding)
Release date:	November 2024
Author:	School Lawyers
Reviewer:	Headmaster
Approval body:	Board of Directors *(Ratified at EdComm Meeting)*
Review date:	December 2026

Linked documents

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following published documents

- Exclusions Policy (A1)
- Behaviour Policy (A4)
- Privacy Notice for Parents and Pupils

Acronyms

EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
ISI	Independent Schools Inspectorate

Availability

This Policy may be viewed on the School website and a printed copy is available on request from the School office/Pupil Services Team.

Summary of updates

November - 2024	Review of the complaints policy in line with a case study - BR

Policy Statement

Wisbech Grammar School ("the School") is committed to providing the best education possible for all pupils. We recognise the right of a parent to raise their concerns. We understand the value to all concerned of dealing fairly and effectively with any such concerns. If parents do make a complaint, they can expect it to be treated in line with this Complaints Policy and Procedure.

This complaints procedure applies to all elements of the Wisbech Grammar School: Wisbech Grammar School (Senior School), Wisbech Grammar Prep School, and Wisbech Grammar Kindergarten.

The procedure is made available to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils at the School. Although the Complaints Policy is made available to parents of prospective pupils, it is not available for use by them; 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 only exception to this is if the complaint is a review of a decision taken by the Headmaster to exclude or require the removal of a pupil under the terms of the Parent/School Contract, in which case such a review must be requested by no later than five working days from the date of the decision to exclude or require the removal of a pupil.

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

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. The School is here for your child and you can be assured that your child will not be penalised for a complaint that you or your child raise in good faith. The School is open to receiving your views and ideas. Please contact a member of staff, as described below.

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.

The Three-Stage Complaints Procedure

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 child's Form Tutor or Subject Teacher in the first instance. In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly and easily by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Form Tutor or Subject Teacher cannot resolve the matter alone it may be necessary for them to consult the Assistant Head Pastoral or the Senior Deputy Head, or Deputy Head Academic. In the case of the Prep School and the Form Teacher cannot resolve the issue, they will consult the Senior Deputy Head, WGS Prep.

Complaints made directly to the Assistant Head Pastoral or the Senior Deputy Head, or Deputy Head Academic will usually be referred to the relevant Form Tutor, Subject Teacher or Houseparent unless the individual deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.

A written record will be made of all concerns and complaints and the date on which they were received. At this informal resolution stage, the member of staff dealing with the concern or complaint may investigate the matter in question and consult with other members of staff, if appropriate. The complaint may be referred to the Assistant Head Pastoral or the Senior Deputy Head, or Deputy Heads Academic where necessary.

Should the matter not be resolved within 7 working days (Saturday and Sunday are excluded as working days) or in the event that the Assistant Head Pastoral or the Senior Deputy Head, or Deputy Heads Academic 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, however, the complaint is against the Headmaster, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of the Advisory Board whose contact details are available from the School on request.

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 Headmaster. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

In most cases, the Headmaster will meet or speak to the parents concerned to discuss the matter within 7 working days of receiving the complaint. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

It may be necessary for the Headmaster, or their nominee, to carry out further investigations.

The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. If appropriate, a meeting will be arranged and the Headmaster will determine who should be invited to attend such a meeting.

Once the Headmaster 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 Headmaster will also give reasons for his decision. In most cases, the Headmaster will make his decision and provide the parents with reasons within 14 working days of the complaint being put in writing.

If the complaint is against the Headmaster, the complaint should be made to the Chair of the Advisory Board. The Chair of the Advisory Board or their nominee will call for a full report from the Headmaster and for all the relevant documents. The Chair of the Advisory Board or their nominee may also call for a briefing from members of staff, and will in most cases, speak to or meet with the parents to discuss the matter further. Once the Chair of the Advisory Board or their nominee is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, the parents will be informed of the decision in writing. The Chair of the Advisory Board or their nominee will give reasons for their decision.

If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they should proceed to Stage 3 of this procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution) they should do so in writing to the Company Secretary within five 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 Company Secretary, who has been appointed by the Board of Directors 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 and one of whom shall be independent of the management and running of the School. The Complaints Panel will appoint one of the Panel members to act as the Chair of the Panel. The convenor, 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 deems it necessary, it 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 Headmaster shall also be entitled to be accompanied to the hearing by one other person if they wish. This may be a relative, teacher or friend. Legal representation will not be appropriate. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.

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.

It is the Panel's task to look at the issues in an impartial and confidential manner. After due consideration of all facts they consider relevant, the Panel will make findings as to whether or not the Stage 2 decision was a reasonable one and accordingly decide whether to:

- Dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
- Uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
- may make recommendations.

The Panel will write to the parents to inform them of its decision and the reasons for it, within 5 working days of the hearing. 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 to the parents, and, where relevant, the person complained about as well as the Proprietor and the Headmaster. A copy of the Panel's findings and

recommendations (if any) will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the proprietor and the Headmaster.

In accordance with the Independent School Standards Regulations 2014, Wisbech Grammar School will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Procedure and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Any complaint or appeal of a decision taken by the Headmaster to exclude or require the removal of the pupil under the terms of the Parent/School Contract will be governed by this Stage 3 of the School's Complaints Procedure. In such circumstances, the Panel may only uphold the complaint and ask the Headmaster to reconsider his decision if they consider, having regard to the process followed by the Headmaster, that the Headmaster's decision to exclude or require the removal of the pupil was not a reasonable decision for the Headmaster to have taken.

Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

Parents of EYFS children should follow the three stages of this Complaints Procedure. 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. Parents will be notified by ISI or Ofsted of the outcome of the investigation into their complaint within 28 days of the complaint being received.

Wisbech Grammar 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 Retention of Records Policy.

Parents may complain directly to Ofsted or to ISI if they believe the provider is not meeting the EYFS requirements. Schools must make available details of how to contact Ofsted and/ or the ISI.

Ofsted can be contacted
by phone: 0300 123 1231 or
by email: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk , or
by post: Ofsted, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester M1 2WD

ISI can be contacted
by phone: 020 7600 0100 or
by email: concerns@isi.net
by post: ISI, CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London EC1A 9HA

Dealing with complaints

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

Please note that, for the purposes of this procedure, working days refers to weekdays (Monday to Friday) during term time, excluding bank holidays. 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.

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 Stage 1 (informal stage), 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 for Parents and Pupils. 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,
- Name of pupil,
- Description of the issue,
- Records of all the investigations (if 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 and minutes of the hearing, and
- The Panel's written decision.

This may include sensitive personal information, sometimes known as 'special category personal data', (as further detailed in the School's Privacy Notice for Parents and Pupils and Data Protection Policy, 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 and Retention of Records Policy.

Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the Education and Skills Act 2008 requests access to them.