

WAKEFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOUNDATION

POLICY FOR DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS AGAINST THE FOUNDATION SCHOOLS AND THEIR STAFF

Introduction

The Foundation is required under the Education (Independent Schools Standards) Regulations 2003 to adopt, make available to parents of pupils and prospective pupils, and apply a complaints procedure in order to comply with the standards against which the Independent Schools Inspection will be carried out. These procedures are also relevant to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

It is important that parents, pupils and members of the public who have a grievance should have the opportunity to express their views and feelings and that they should obtain a fair hearing and prompt response to any complaint they make.

It is also important that the Foundation should have due regard for the rights of all who work for them and that any complaints against members of staff should be handled in a professional manner.

This policy is available to download from the Foundation website or on request from Governors' Office.

Definition of a Complaint

Complaints are not defined in the Independent Schools Standards Regulations but are regarded as being a statement of protest or remonstrance, verbal or written. There is a difference between a complaint and a concern which can best be described as an expression of lower level unease. Concerns should be handled informally through normal dialogue and discussion whereas complaints should be subject to a formal procedure.

Complaints can fall into a number of categories. Some examples are listed below but the list is not exhaustive.

- Complaints may be about operational or administrative matters such as school procedures, school finances or a breach of contract. These complaints can be specific or general.
- Complaints may be about the handling of a situation by staff or the management of the Foundation or the schools.
- Complaints may relate to the behaviour of a pupil or group of pupils
- Complaints may be academic in nature and relate to areas such as the service provided by the schools, the content of a course, the quantity of homework being given or progress by a pupil in a particular subject.
- Complaints may involve a child who is unhappy at school, is being bullied or has received an inappropriate sanction for indiscipline.
- Complaints may involve child protection issues

Complaints can be made to the Foundation or to the schools that are general or they may be about specific members of staff and complaints can be received from parents, pupils, members of staff or members of the public.

Complaints made by members of staff in respect of their own employment by the Foundation are covered by the Grievance procedure set out in the Terms and Conditions of Employment for teaching and support staff.

Procedure

The basic policy for complaints either verbal or written is to deal with them promptly, thoroughly and professionally. All complaints should be acknowledged within 72 hours with the promise of an effective enquiry and action if appropriate. A copy of this policy should be sent to the complainant.

The schools should attempt initially to resolve complaints on an informal basis.

Easily-resolved complaints (Informal Complaint)

It may be that the complaint is easily resolved and can be handled informally by an appropriate member of staff such as a form teacher, the Head of Year, a member of the Senior Management Team or a member of the Governors' office in the event of a Foundation level complaint. A full response must be sent to the complainant in writing within 28 working days even if the original complaint was made verbally.

Significant complaints (Formal Complaint)

If a parent is not satisfied with the response made initially on an informal basis then the Foundation will follow a formal procedure for the complaint, which should be made in writing.

If a complaint is significant or complex such that it cannot easily be resolved on an informal basis then it should be reported at once to both the Head of the school and the Bursar for information and attention. If the complaint has been made directly to the Governors or to the Bursar (as representative of the Governors), then the Bursar will inform the relevant Head immediately and send a letter of acknowledgement to the complainant within 72 hours.

If the complainant alleges professional incompetence or neglect against a member of staff or alleges that a member of staff behaved unreasonably or unprofessionally then the relevant Head should be informed immediately.

If there is a complaint against the Head then the details should be passed to the Bursar. If a complaint is made against the Bursar then details should be passed to the Spokesman.

The relevant Head or Deputy Head in the absence of the Head will take steps to ensure that the complaint is fully and properly investigated according to the rules of natural justice and always with regard to the best interest of the pupil or pupils

concerned. All steps taken should be recorded in writing including interviews with individuals involved and any evidence or documentation should be preserved.

Following the investigation, the relevant Head or the Bursar as appropriate will convey to the complainant as appropriate the outcome of the investigation which must be within 20 working days of the initial acknowledgement sent to the complainant. In all cases the outcome must be confirmed to the complainant in writing even if it is relayed initially to the complainant verbally or in person.

Child Abuse

Any complaint or allegation that might be categorised as child abuse should be reported immediately in accordance with the Foundation's Child Protection Policy.

Failure to resolve a complaint

If the complaint or grievance has not been resolved under the formal procedure above then the Foundation will make provision for a hearing before a panel appointed by the Governors. The complainant should submit a formal written notice within 20 working days of receiving the outcome to the formal complaint to the Bursar and Clerk to the Governors who will report the matter to the Governors.

The panel will then meet to consider the complaint within 20 working days of receipt of the formal notice. The panel members will be appointed by the Spokesman and the Bursar and Clerk to the Governors and shall comprise at least three members, two of whom should be serving Governors and not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint. The third member should be a person independent of the management and running of the Foundation. This person will be chosen by the Bursar and Clerk to the Governors. The Bursar and Clerk to the Governors should also attend the panel but only to ensure the fairness and smooth running of the hearing.

All relevant documentation must be submitted at least 3 working days before the panel is scheduled to sit. The documentation will be reviewed and the complainant and other involved parties will be invited to appear before the panel to present information and/or answer questions. The Governors will accept written submissions from any party who is not able or does not wish to attend in person. A parent or parents or any other individual not employed by the Foundation who is invited to appear before the panel may be accompanied if they wish. An employee of the Foundation invited to appear before the panel may only be accompanied by a colleague or a trade union representative.

The decision of the panel will be final and will be made within 5 working days of the panel meeting. *The panel will where appropriate make findings and recommendations and a copy of these findings and recommendations will be provided in writing to the complainant at his or her home address, and where relevant to the person(s) complained about. A copy of the findings and recommendations will be available for inspection at Governors' Office by the Governors or the Head teacher.*

For the Early Years Foundation Stage, if parents are not satisfied with the outcome they can make a complaint to Ofsted, if they so wish. Contact details are:

Ofsted, Royal Exchange Buildings, St Ann's Square, Manchester M2 7LA.

A written record of all complaints, including those related to EYFS, will be kept for a minimum of 3 years *at the Governors' Office. A record will be kept of whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing.*

Any correspondence, statements or records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 162A of the 2002 Education Act, as amended, requires access to them.

Working Days

For the purposes of this policy, working days are deemed to be Monday to Friday during school term time. Details of school term dates are available from the Foundation schools or from the Foundation website.