WINCHESTER
COLLEGE

Complaints Procedure for Parents

Next review date: **September 2027**

Reviewer: **Bursar**

The School prides itself on the quality of the teaching and pastoral care provided to its pupils. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this three-stage Complaints Procedure.

Publication and availability of Procedure

The School makes this Complaints Procedure available to all parents of current pupils on the School's website. Parents may also request a copy from the School. Parents of pupils who request it are made aware that this document is published on the School's website and available from the School.

The School is required to make available the number of formal complaints (Stage 2) received during the previous academic year:

For the academic year 2025/2026 the School received one formal complaint.

Who may use this Procedure?

This Procedure is for use only by parents of current pupils. Complaints by parents of former pupils will be dealt with under this 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 terminate the enrolment of a pupil under the School's Terms and Conditions (the Parent Contract) in which case such a review must be requested by no later than seven working days from the date of the decision to exclude or terminate the enrolment of a pupil.

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

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 the procedure. A complaint is likely to arise if a parent believes that the School has done something wrong, or failed to do so something that it should have done or acted unfairly.

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially, and that their child will not be penalised for a complaint raised in good faith. 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, or where any other legal obligation prevails.

Timeframe for dealing with complaints

Complaints will be acknowledged within seven working days.

It is in everyone's interests to resolve a complaint as speedily as possible. The School's target is to complete the first two stages of the procedure within 28 working days of the complaint being lodged and Stage 3, the Appeal Panel Hearing, within a further 28 working days.

For the purposes of this Procedure, a working day is any day within term time as published on the School's website (but not including Exeats or Leave-outs). If practicable, the School may endeavour to deal with a complaint within the holiday period, but is not obliged to do so.

Resolving a complaint may take longer during certain periods (for example where there is significant disruption to school life or unavoidable staff absence), but 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.

Persistent correspondence

Where a complaint has been considered at all three stages under this procedure, further attempts to raise the same complaint may be deemed vexatious and outside the scope of this procedure.

Recording Complaints and use of personal data

The School will keep a written record of all formal complaints, including the stage at which they are resolved and any action taken by the School as a result (regardless of whether they are upheld).

The School processes and records data in accordance with its Privacy Notice, which can be found on the School's website. When dealing with complaints, the School (including any panel member appointed under the Stage 3 process) may process a range of information, including special category data, which is likely to include the following:

- Date when the issue was raised.
- Names of parents and 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 or minutes of the hearing.
- The Panel's written decision.

The Three-Stage Complaints Procedure

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

1.1 It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally and will generally be handled by the Housemaster.

1.2 Accordingly, parents should normally contact their child's Housemaster in the first instance, and he will consult with other colleagues as required.

1.3 Complaints made directly to other staff such as a Head of Department, a Surmaster, Deputy Head, Second Master, or Headmaster will usually be referred to the Housemaster

in the first instance, unless circumstances require another member of staff to handle the matter.

1.4 The Housemaster 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 seven working days, then parents will be advised to proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Procedure.

1.5 If, however, the complaint is against the Headmaster, parents should make their complaint to the Warden (i.e. the Chairman of Governors of the School) through the Bursar in his capacity as Secretary to the Governing Body.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

The Headmaster may delegate responsibility at this stage to another senior member of staff (such as the Second Master, Deputy Head Pastoral, or Director of Studies). All references to 'Headmaster' under Stage 2 shall automatically be taken to include his / her delegate.

2.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, then the parents should put their complaint in writing to the Headmaster. The Headmaster may require further information from the parents to help clarify the scope and nature of their concerns. The Headmaster will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

2.2 In most cases, the Headmaster will meet or speak to the parents concerned, normally within seven working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. Every attempt will be made to reach a resolution at this stage.

2.3 It may be necessary for the Headmaster to carry out further investigations.

2.4 The Headmaster will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held with parents in relation to the complaint.

2.5 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 in writing of this decision and the basis on which it was made. In most cases, this written advice will be provided within 21 working days of the complaint being put in writing as set out in paragraph 2.1 above, (or following the provision of any further clarificatory information about the complaint to the Head, if so requested).

2.6 If the complaint is against the Headmaster, the complaint should, as at Stage 1, be made to the Warden (via the Secretary to the Governing Body). The Warden will nominate someone to determine the complaint. The Stage 2 process described above will then be followed as if the references to the Headmaster were to the Warden's nominee.

2.7 If parents are still not satisfied with the decision, they can proceed to Stage 3 of this Procedure.

Stage 3 – Panel Hearing

3.1 If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following a failure to reach an earlier resolution), they should do so in writing to the Bursar, in his capacity as Secretary to the Governing Body, within seven calendar days of receiving the decision at Stage 2, setting out their grounds of appeal. Any supporting evidence should also be provided with their grounds of appeal. If parents are unable to provide their complaint within the time period stipulated due to extenuating circumstances, the parents should request an extension in writing. Such a request must be made to the Bursar before expiry of the original deadline, setting out the further time period requested and the reason for this.

3.2 The Bursar will acknowledge the complaint within seven working days and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and normally within 28 working days. The Bursar 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 Warden will appoint one Panel member to chair the Panel.

3.3 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 normally not later than seven working days prior to the hearing.

3.4 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 he / she wishes. In both cases, this person may be a relative, teacher or friend. Their role is as a supporter and observer, and they are not permitted to speak or otherwise participate in the proceedings. Legal representation will not be appropriate and the companion should not be a lawyer. The Panel will decide whether it would be helpful for witnesses to attend.

3.5 A note-taker may attend the hearing. Notes of the hearing will not be a verbatim transcript but an accurate record of what was discussed. The notes 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. Audio recordings of the hearing will not be permitted.

3.6 The remit of the Panel shall be at the discretion of the Warden and the manner in which the hearing is conducted shall be at the discretion of the Panel.

3.7 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.

3.8 After due consideration of the merits 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 on the balance of probabilities and accordingly decide whether to:

- dismiss the complaint(s) in whole or in part;
- uphold the complaint(s) in whole or in part; and
- make recommendations.

3.9 The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it, normally within seven 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 Warden 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 Warden and the Headmaster.

3.10 Any complaint about a decision taken by the Headmaster to exclude a pupil or terminate their enrolment (previously called "required removal") under the Parent Contract will be governed by this Stage 3 of the School's Complaints Procedure. In such circumstances, the Panel may only uphold the complaint if they consider, having regard to the process

followed by the Headmaster, that the Headmaster's decision was not, on the balance of probabilities, a reasonable decision for the Headmaster to have taken.

Serial, unreasonable and persistent complaints

Parents wishing to use the Complaints Procedure must behave reasonably and courteously, and in a manner which supports effective investigation and decision making and an ongoing, constructive relationship with the School and its staff.

Both the School and parents are expected to respond in a manner appropriate and proportionate to the subject matter of the complaint. Whilst the School does not seek to limit parents' ability to make a complaint, this Complaints Procedure is not intended to be used for contesting minor or routine operational or educational decisions: examples might include allocation of beds within a dormitory; selection for a sports team; award of marks for an internal examination.

In extreme cases, where parents' behaviour is aggressive, excessively demanding on staff or otherwise unreasonable, the Headmaster or Warden may apply restrictions to the mode of parents' interactions with staff or put in place additional measures to be observed in progressing the complaint.