

# Complaints Policy

<b>Applies to</b>	Whole School
<b>Responsibility</b>	Head Master
<b>Approving Body</b>	Full Governing Body
<b>Date reviewed</b>	Michaelmas 2025
<b>Next review</b>	Michaelmas 2026

Wells Cathedral School is proud of the quality of its teaching, pastoral and boarding care. Nonetheless, complaints from parents and pupils can and do arise from time to time. In these instances parents can expect to be treated by the School with care and in accordance with this Complaints Policy. Parents can also 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(s) in good faith.

The purpose of our formal complaints procedure is to give those who have exhausted the obvious ways (talking and seeking advice) of tackling something which seems to them to be inappropriate, harmful or threatening, a route by which to bring the complaint to the attention of a senior person who can address it and do something about it. The aim will always be to resolve the problem which has led to the complaint and to learn lessons for the future in a positive and confidential manner. Written procedures for members of the teaching or non-teaching staff to state a grievance are promulgated separately.

Requests for financial awards, such as claims for compensation, damages or fee refunds, are beyond the scope of the School's complaints procedure.

This policy provides guidelines for handling complaints. The policy applies to all sections of the School. The procedures set out below may be adapted as appropriate to meet the policy aims and circumstances of each case. Certain parts of the procedures can only be carried out during Term time.

The complaints procedure applies to parents of pupils currently at the School. It does not apply in respect of past pupils unless the complaint was initially raised whilst the pupil was still at the School. This procedure does not apply to complaints by prospective parents, including those who have accepted a place at the School in respect of their child but where their child has not yet started at the School.

The School aims to resolve all complaints efficiently and promptly and parents are encouraged to bring any matter causing concern to the School's attention as soon as possible. Whenever possible, a complaint should be raised within three months of the incident, or where a series of associated incidents have occurred, within three months of the last of these incidents. However, the School will consider complaints made within 12 months if exceptional circumstances apply. Therefore, a complaint raised after three months should include details of the reasons for the delay.

## Complaints Procedure

Complaints made with the School are dealt with via a three-stage process.

### 1. Stage One: Informal Resolution

1.1 It is hoped that most complaints will be resolved quickly and informally. Examples might include dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care, or about allocation of privileges or responsibilities, or about a timetable clash or some other aspect of the School's systems or equipment, or a billing error. The School will acknowledge a written notification by email, letter or telephone within ten normal school working days<sup>1</sup> of receipt of the original complaint during term time.

1.2 If parents have a complaint concerning education matters they should normally contact their child's teacher or Tutor as appropriate. In many cases, the matter will be resolved quickly by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the teacher or Tutor cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for the teacher/Tutor to consult the Head of Department, Head of Faculty, Head of Year or Houseparent, as appropriate, who will then deal with the matter.

1.3 If the complaint concerns a pastoral matter, parents should normally contact the appropriate Tutor or Houseparent.

1.4 If the complaint concerns a music-related matter, parents should normally contact the appropriate music teacher or the Director of Music.

1.5 A problem over any disciplinary action taken or a sanction imposed should be raised first of all with the member of staff who imposed it and, if not resolved, with either of the Deputy Heads (Academic or Pastoral) or Head of the Prep School.

1.6 A query relating to financial matters (for example, fees) should be stated in writing to the Bursar.

1.7 Complaints made directly to a Head of Department or Houseparent may be referred to the relevant teacher or Tutor unless it is felt appropriate for him/her to deal with the matter personally.

1.8 On occasion, complaints may be dealt with by members of the Senior Management Team (including the Head of the Prep School and Head Master) but still be resolved informally and successfully.

1.9 If the complaint is against the Head Master, parents should make their complaint directly to the Chair of Governors whose contact details are available from the School on request, or via the Bursar (as Clerk to the Governors). The Chair will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take.

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<sup>1</sup> When we use the term "working days" we mean Monday to Friday during term time, excluding bank holidays and half terms. It may take longer to process complaints received during holidays due to the availability of staff. Although Little Wellies Nursery operates all year round, it may only be possible to process complaints during the Whole School term-time owing to Senior Management staff availability, although every reasonable step will be taken to expedite this if a complaint is received out of term-time. 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 timescales 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.

1.10 Should the matter not be resolved within 15 working days then parents may proceed with their complaint in accordance with Stage 2 of this Policy.

## **2. Stage Two: Formal Resolution**

2.1 If the complaint cannot be resolved on an informal basis as described in Stage 1, or if it has not been resolved within 15 working days, then the parents should put their complaint in writing<sup>2</sup> to the Head Master<sup>3</sup>, making it clear that they are raising a Formal Complaint. Parents should complete the appended Complaint Form (Appendix 1) to proceed to Stage 2. In the event that such notifications are received by another member of the Senior Management Team, these will be forwarded to the Head Master. He will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. This must be done even where the informal process has been conducted with the Head Master. If parents require assistance with their request, for example, because of a disability, the School will be happy to make appropriate arrangements<sup>4</sup>.

2.2 In most cases, the Head Master will meet with or speak to the parent(s) concerned, normally within 10 working days of receiving the complaint, to discuss the matter. If possible, a resolution will be reached at this stage.

2.3 It may be necessary for the Head Master, or their nominee, to carry out further investigations or to ask a senior member of staff or another independent person to act as Investigator. The Investigator may ask for additional information from the complainant and may wish to speak to them personally and to others who may have knowledge of the circumstances including, if appropriate, the complainant's child.

2.4 Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential.

2.5 Once the Head Master 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 Master will also give reasons for this decision. The Head Master's aim will be to inform any complainant of the outcome of an investigation and the resolution of the complaint within 28 working days from the first receipt of the complaint.

2.6 If parents are dissatisfied with the Head Master's decision under Stage 2 they may proceed to Stage 3 of this Policy.

2.7 Where the complaint is in relation to EYFS provision, a response will be made to the complainant outlining the outcomes of the investigation within 28 working days of receiving the complaint. Written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint will be kept. All correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential.

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<sup>2</sup> When we refer to notifications or requests in writing, both letter and email are acceptable.

<sup>3</sup> In the absence of the Head Master, contact should be made via the person acting in the Head Master's capacity, or the Bursar.

<sup>4</sup> Please note that the School will be very happy to arrange assistance if required, through the person coordinating complaints, in the event of any difficulty in submitting any request in writing required by this Policy

### 3. Stage Three – Panel Hearing

#### 3.1 *Request for a Panel Hearing*

If parents seek to invoke Stage 3 (following failure to reach an earlier resolution) then they can ask for it to be referred in writing to the Chair of Governors, via the Bursar (as Clerk to the Governors), within 10 working days of receipt of the Head Master's response (or longer by agreement). The application must state the grounds for the review, specifying the unresolved issues, and the outcome sought.

#### 3.2 *Review Panel*

The Bursar (Clerk to the Governors) will convene a panel of at least three people (usually two Governors who have not been directly involved with the matter complained about and an independent member who is not directly connected with the management or running or governance of the School). The panel will not normally include the Chair of Governors. The panel will appoint one of their members to act as the Chair of the panel.

#### 3.3 *Review Meeting*

A panel review meeting will be set up as soon as practicable, normally within 10 working days of the issue being referred to the Chair, subject to the availability of complainant(s) and panel members. At the review meeting with the panel, the pupil and parent(s) may be accompanied by another adult, however this does not entitle the parent(s) to legal representation at the meeting. The Clerk to the Governors must be given 7 working days notice if the friend or relation is legally qualified. If possible the panel will resolve the parent(s)' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the panel will decide how this should be carried out, and unless there is an unforeseen delay, complainants will be notified of the outcome of an investigation within 28 working days of the review meeting. Panel meetings will not normally take place during school holidays.

3.4 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.

3.5 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.

3.6 Where no further investigation is required, within 10 working days of the review meeting (or longer by agreement) the complainant, Head Master, and where relevant the person complained about, will be sent a copy of any findings and recommendations by electronic or delivery mail. An additional copy of the findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the School premises by the Chair of Governors.

3.7 It is not within the powers of the Panel to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents, although they may recommend these actions to the School's Head Master or Governing Body.

3.8 In all cases the decision of the panel will be final. Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially.

## **Vexatious and Persistent Complaints**

We hope that our complaints procedures should limit the number of complaints that become protracted or vexatious; and if the procedures are followed correctly to keep the complainant informed of what is happening, this should not become an issue.

However, occasionally, a complainant may remain dissatisfied despite all the procedures having been followed. It may well be a case of not being able to resolve all their concerns and meet all their wishes. Sometimes it is simply a case of 'agreeing to disagree' and moving on.

If the complainant continues to make representations to the School or attempts to re-open the same issue, the Chair of Governors should inform them, in writing, that the procedures have all been followed and that all reasonable action has been taken to try to resolve the issue and that the matter is now closed. In some cases, it may be necessary to seek legal advice to deal with particularly vexatious or persistent complainants. (See Appendix 2 for further explanation and detail).

Threats involving the media and/or legal action will be treated respectfully, whilst reassuring the complainant that the School will respond to any letters or approaches from the media or solicitors in the normal way and in line with the appropriate procedures.

Occasionally, the behaviour of a complainant can pose a threat to the School community. If this occurs, a warning letter will be sent to the person in which it is made clear that unwelcome and threatening behaviour is not tolerated. If required to do so, the School will engage local authorities and may take further legal advice.

A written record of all formal complaints, whether resolved following a formal resolution, or whether they have proceeded to a panel hearing, is retained by the Head Master and categorised according to their nature (eg boarding). A record is also kept of the actions taken by the School as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The number of complaints registered under the formal procedure (Stage 2 or beyond) during the preceding year will be made available upon request from the Head Master's PA. 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 2008 Act requests access to them. Records of EYFS complaints will, as required, be made available to Ofsted and ISI on request. Likewise, in accordance with paragraph 32(1) of Schedule 1 to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Wells Cathedral School will also make available, on request, to Ofsted, the Department for Education (DfE) or the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI), details of this Complaints Policy and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

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 fulfillment 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.

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

An individual complaint should be made through the School's complaints procedure or through

Ofsted if it is in relation to EYFS (Ofsted, National Business Unit, Piccadilly Gate, Store Street, Manchester, M1 2WD - Tel: 030 123 1231) - Email: [enquires@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquires@ofsted.gov.uk)). ISI (ISI, Cap House, 9 - 12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA Tel: 020 7600 0100 - Email: [concerns@isi.net](mailto:concerns@isi.net)) and DfE (Tel: 01325 735 304) may be contacted in connection with statutory Regulations or Standards.

### **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). Details of any Stage 1 complaints may also be kept as a written record.

The School processes data in accordance with its Privacy Notice. 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 the following:

- Date of when the issue was raised
- Name of parent(s)
- 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/minutes of any hearing
- The Panel's written decision

This may include 'special category 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 and Information Management Policy.

Copies of this policy are available on request, or from the School website.

## Appendix 1

### Wells Cathedral School – Stage 2 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.

**This form should be used to submit a Stage 2 Complaint only.**

This form should be completed by those with parental responsibility for a pupil and returned to the Head Master or, if the complaint is about the Head Master, to the Chair of Governors via the Bursar,

<b>Your name(s)</b>	
<b>Name of pupil(s), years(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</b> 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.	



Action taken to date (including staff members(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):

Date:

## Appendix 2

### Unreasonable Complaints

1. The School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. It will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the School. However, the School does not expect staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

2. Where repeated attempts are made by a parent to raise the same complaint after it has been considered at all three stages, this can be regarded as vexatious and outside the scope of the policy.

3. Unreasonable complaints are taken seriously by the School as they put a strain on valuable resources and hinder the progress of proper investigations.

4. The School adopts the Department for Education's definition of unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the School, such as if the complainant:

- i. refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- ii. refuses to cooperate with the complaints investigation process;
- iii. refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- iv. insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- v. introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- vi. makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- vii. changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- viii. repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- ix. refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the School's complaints procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed;
- x. seeks an unrealistic outcome; makes excessive demands on School time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with;
- xi. uses threats to intimidate;
- xii. uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence;
- xiii. knowingly provides falsified information;
- xiv. publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

5. A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if it is manifestly unjustified, inappropriate, or an improper use of formal procedure.

6. In assessing this, the School shall have regard to all the circumstances of the case and the nature of the complaint itself rather than the nature of the complainant. In assessing all of the circumstances of the case the School will consider a range of factors including:

- i. whether a complaint has reasonable foundation;
- ii. the history and context of the complaint (and any evidence where relevant);
- iii. whether the time and cost of investigating the complaint is proportionate to the issue(s) complained of;
- iv. whether an investigation of the complaint is likely to cause a disproportionate or unjustified level of disruption, irritation or distress;
- v. unexplained delay in raising a complaint or issue;
- vi. if the purpose of the complaint is to obtain an outcome which is unavailable via the complaints procedure, such as a claim for compensation, damages or a refund of fees paid;
- vii. any evidence of a complaint being brought for an improper purpose.

7. Whenever possible, the Head Master and/or Chair of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before dismissing a complaint as unreasonable.

8. If the behaviour continues, the School will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it.

9. For complainants who excessively contact the School causing a significant level of disruption, the School may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

10. In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the School will immediately inform the Police and communicate its actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the School.