



Policy	Formal Complaints
Approved	Spring 2024
Approved by	School Committee
Date for revision	Spring 2025
Reviewed by	Head

Introduction

Old Palace has long prided itself on the quality of teaching and pastoral care provided to its students. However, if parents do have a complaint, they can expect it to be treated with due respect by the School and in accordance with this procedure.

Working days for the purposes of this procedure shall mean working days during a school term.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. During Term Time, a response should be received, where possible, within 2 working days.
- If parents have a complaint they can raise this with any member of staff but should normally contact their child's Head of Year who, if appropriate, will liaise with Heads of Department or one of the Assistant or Deputy Heads. In many cases, the matter will be resolved straightaway by this means to the parents' satisfaction. If the Head of Year cannot resolve the matter alone, it may be necessary for them to consult one of the Deputy Heads.
- Complaints made directly to the Head will usually be referred to the relevant Head of Year unless the Head deems it appropriate for them to deal with the matter personally.
- The Head of Year will keep written notes regarding any complaint received. Should the matter not be resolved within ten working days or in the event that the Head of Year 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 procedure.
- Anonymous complaints will not normally be investigated.

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 who will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action to take. The receipt of the complaint will be acknowledged in writing within 5 working days, indicating how the School proposes to proceed, and a copy of the Complaints Procedure will be enclosed with this acknowledgement.
- Should the Head have concerns as to the validity of the complaint they reserve the right to refer the matter to the Chairman of the Court of Governors. Examples of a complaint which may be considered to be invalid include if:
 - The complainant is not a current parent, or the complaint concerns a matter which should reasonably have been raised whilst the student was at the school

- The complaint concerns a matter which occurred more than a year previously and could reasonably be expected to be raised at that time
 - The complaint covers a matter or matters which have already been dealt with under a previous complaint
 - The complaint concerns a matter over which the school has no lawful control (eg where the complainant disagrees with a statutory or lawfully advised course of action)
 - It is vexatious or otherwise made in bad faith.
- The Head 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 the Head to carry out further investigations. This may be delegated to another member of the Senior Leadership Team ie Deputy or Assistant Head.
 - The Head or the member of the Senior Leadership Team (if delegated) will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint.
 - Once the Head is satisfied that, so far as is practicable, all of the relevant facts have been established, a decision will be made within 5 working days and parents will be informed of this decision in writing. The Head will also give reasons for their decision.
 - The period of time between the Head receiving the complaint and informing parents of the final decision will be no longer than 20 working days. Please note that any complaint received within 20 working days of the end of term or half term is likely to take longer to resolve owing to school holidays and the unavailability of staff.
 - It is hoped that parents will feel satisfied with the outcome, or that, at least, all concerns raised by parents have been fully and fairly considered. 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 or if the complaint relates to the Head's own actions), they should contact the Clerk to the Foundation, who has been appointed by the Governors of the Court of John Whitgift Foundation to call hearings of the Complaints Panel. The letter to the Clerk to the Foundation should be delivered within 5 working days of the receipt of the Head's decision at Stage 2.
- The matter will then be referred to the Complaints Panel for consideration. The panel will consist of at least 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, as set out by the Department for Education. Each of the Panel members shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Governors of the Court of John Whitgift Foundation. The Clerk to the Foundation, on behalf of the Panel, will then acknowledge the complaint and schedule a hearing to take place as soon as practicable and certainly within twenty working days of receipt of the complaint by the Clerk.

- 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. Copies of such particulars shall be supplied by the Clerk to the Foundation to all parties not later than seven working days prior to the hearing.
- The parents may be accompanied to the hearing by one other person. This may be a relative or a friend. Legal representation will not normally be appropriate.
- If possible, the Panel will resolve the parents' complaint immediately without the need for further investigation. Where further investigation is required, the Panel will decide how it should be carried out.
- The Head's decision may be stayed pending the decision of the Complaints Panel, upon application for a stay by the parents, in the first instance to the Head and if necessary to the Chairman of the Governors of the Court of John Whitgift Foundation. Where such a stay is granted, the Head or the Chairman may, where they consider it appropriate, direct the student to remain absent from the School pending the Hearing and the Complaint Panel's decision.
- A full minute of proceedings will be taken.
- After due consideration of all the facts they consider relevant, the Panel will reach a decision, which it shall complete within ten working days of the Hearing. The Panel will write to the parents informing them of its decision and the reasons for it. The decision of the Panel will be final. The Panel's findings will be sent in writing to the parents, the Head, the Governors of the Court of John Whitgift Foundation and, where relevant, the person about whom the complaint was made.

Written record

A written record is kept of all complaints, and of whether they are resolved at the preliminary stage or proceed to a panel hearing. A written record is also kept of any action taken by the School as a result of these complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The complaints record is held by the Head and includes any complaint which reached the Head whether informal or formal.

For information on the number of formal complaints that the school received in the last academic year, please contact the Head's PA.

Confidentiality

Parents can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated seriously and confidentially. 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 108 or 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

Contact details for Chairman of the Court of Governors:

The Chairman of the Court of Governors of John Whitgift Foundation is
Mr Christopher Houlding, Chartered FCSI.

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c/o the Clerk

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Reviewed by the Head: Spring 2024
Next review: Summer 2025