

Complaints Policy

- 1 Introduction
 - 1.1 Wendover Online School's Parental Complaints Policy and Procedures is drafted in accordance with Part 7 of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and is made available to parents on the School's website and in hard copy from the central office.
 - 1.2 The School aims to ensure that any complaint is managed sympathetically, efficiently, quickly and at the appropriate level and resolved as soon as possible. We will try to resolve every complaint in a positive way with the aim of putting right a matter which may have gone wrong and, where necessary, we will review our systems and procedures in light of the circumstances of the complaint.
 - 1.3 We recognise that a difficulty which is not resolved quickly and fairly can soon become a cause of resentment and so we need to know as soon as possible if there is any cause for dissatisfaction. Parents and pupils should never feel that making a complaint will adversely affect a pupil or his / her opportunities at the School.
 - 1.4 This Policy applies to complaints from parents of current pupils and to parents of former pupils if the complaint was raised when the pupil was registered at the School.
 - 1.5 We aim to resolve any complaints in a timely manner. Timescales for each stage are set out below in the relevant paragraphs. When we refer to **working days**, we mean Monday to Friday, when School is open during term time. The dates of terms are published on the School's website.
 - 1.6 It is expected that the complaints procedure will progress in a timely manner. The School aims to resolve any complaint efficiently and promptly and parents are encouraged to bring any complaints to the School's attention as soon as possible after any incident causing concern.
- 2 Management of complaints
 - 2.1 The School's complaints procedure has three stages:
 - 2.1.1 **Stage 1:** informal raising of a complaint with a member of staff orally or in writing – further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 1.
 - 2.1.2 **Stage 2:** a formal complaint in writing to the Principal – further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 2.
 - 2.1.3 **Stage 3:** reference to the Complaints Panel – further details of this procedure are set out in Appendix 3.
 - 2.2 Separate procedures apply in the event of a child protection issue, or if the Principal expels or requires the removal of a pupil from the School and the parents seek a review of that decision.
- 3 Record keeping and confidentiality
 - 3.1 A written record will be kept of all formal complaints, and of whether they were

resolved at Stage 2 or proceeded to a Complaints Panel Hearing, including the action taken by the School as a result of the complaints, regardless of whether they are upheld. There were no complaints in the Academic Year September 2023 to July 2024.

- 3.2 Correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints will be kept confidential except where access is requested by the Secretary of State or where disclosure is required in the course of an inspection or under other legal authority.
- 3.3 In accordance with data protection principles, details of individual complaints will be kept for 7 years.
- 4 Complaints to Ofsted
 - 4.1 Parents may complain directly to Ofsted which can be contacted on 0300 123 4666 or at enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.
 - 4.2 Please note: The DfE has only recently introduced an accreditation procedure for online schools which is administered by Ofsted. Wendover Online School has applied to be accredited.

Policy review

This policy is designed to set good practice standards. However, the school recognises that best practice develops over time and, as such, will update it regularly in light of experience and as a result of changes in legislation or its own internal organisation and policies. The policy will be subject to a comprehensive review on an annual basis.

Date policy reviewed: September 2024

Date of next review: February 2025

Review Date	Reviewed By	Next Review
1 September 2021	Rachel Smith	September 2022
1 September 2022	Rachel Smith	September 2023
25 February 2024	Sue Bonell	September 2024
30 September 2024	Sarah Thomas	February 2025

Appendix 1: Stage 1 – dealing with concerns and difficulties informally

1 **Informal resolution of a complaint**

- 1.1 We expect that most complaints can be resolved informally. For example, dissatisfaction about some aspect of teaching or pastoral care or a billing error should be able to be resolved by the relevant member of staff.
- 2 Who to contact
 - 2.1 Where appropriate, complaints should initially be raised as follows:
 - 2.1.1 **Educational issues:** if the matter relates to the classroom, the curriculum or special educational needs, please speak or write initially to the pupil's class teacher. Your complaint may be passed to a more senior member of staff if appropriate.
 - 2.1.2 **Pastoral care:** for complaints relating to matters outside the classroom, please speak or write to the pupil's class teacher.
 - 2.1.3 **Disciplinary matters:** 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.
 - 2.2 A complaint against the Principal should be put in writing to Mrs. Sarah Bacon, the Proprietor and Founder, who will follow the procedure set out in Stage 2.
 - 2.3 An informal complaint provided in writing will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as is practicable during the holidays. A matter raised orally will not necessarily be acknowledged in writing, but a record of the matter will be made.
 - 2.4 A complaint which has not been resolved by informal means to the parent's satisfaction within 5 working days should be notified in writing as a formal Stage 2 complaint using the procedure set out in Appendix 2.

Appendix 2: Stage 2 – formal complaint

1 **How to make a formal complaint**

- 1.1 If a parent is dissatisfied with the response to the complaint under Stage 1, the complaint should be raised to Stage 2.
- 1.2 The full details of the complaint should be set out in writing and sent with all relevant documents and full contact details to the Principal. The complaint should clearly state the resolution required.
- 1.3 The complaint will be acknowledged by telephone, email or letter within three working days during term time, and as soon as is practicable during the holidays, indicating the action that is being taken and the likely time scale.

2 Investigation

- 2.1 The Principal will ask a senior member of staff to act as Investigator. The Investigator may request additional information from you and may wish to speak to you personally and to others who have knowledge of the circumstances. Written records will be kept of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. The Investigator will prepare a report on the investigation which will be considered by the Principal.

3 Decision

- 3.1 The Principal will then notify the complainant by email or letter of her Stage 2 decision and the reasons for it within 10 working days from the receipt of the formal complaint. Where there are exceptional circumstances resulting in a delay, the parents will be notified of this and informed of the new timescales as soon as possible.
- 3.2 Please note that any complaint received during a holiday period may take longer to resolve.
- 3.3 If a parent is dissatisfied with the Principal's decision, the parent can request that the complaint be referred to the Complaints Panel under Stage 3 using the procedure set out in Appendix 3.

Appendix 3: Stage 3 – Complaints Panel

1 What is a Complaints Panel Hearing?

- 1.1 A Complaints Panel Hearing is a review of the decisions taken at Stage 2 by the Principal (or in circumstances where the formal complaint concerns the Principal, Mrs Sarah Bacon, Proprietor and Founder, who is appointed to act in her place). The Panel will not consider any new areas of complaint which have not been previously raised as part of the complaints procedure.
- 1.2 Given the online nature of the school the complaints panel will meet virtually on Zoom or Teams or a similar platform.
- 1.3 The role of the Complaints Panel is to establish the facts surrounding the complaints that have been made by considering:
 - 1.3.1 the documents provided by both parties and
 - 1.3.2 any representations made by the Parents and the Principaland to reach a decision, on the balance of probabilities, as to whether each complaint is made out in whole or in part.
- 1.4 It is not within the powers of the Complaints Panel to make any financial award, nor to impose sanctions on staff, pupils or parents. The Complaints Panel may make recommendations to the School on these matters or any other issues as appropriate.

2 How to request a Hearing

- 2.1 A request for a Hearing must be put in writing to the Proprietor and will usually only be considered if the procedures at Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.
- 2.2 The written request should include:
 - 2.2.1 a copy of all relevant documents and full contact details;
 - 2.2.2 details of all the grounds of the complaint and the outcome desired;
 - 2.2.3 whether you propose to be accompanied at the hearing (see paragraph 3.2 below).
- 2.3 The request for a Hearing will be acknowledged in writing within two working days of receipt during term time and as soon as is practicable during the holidays.
- 2.4 Every effort will be made to enable the Hearing to take place within 15 working days of receipt of the request. However, parents should note that the Complaints Panel will not normally sit during half terms or school holidays.

3 Planning the Hearing

- 3.1 As soon as is reasonably practicable, and in any event at least ten working days before the Hearing, written notification will be sent to each party of the date and time of the Hearing.
- 3.2 You may be accompanied at the Hearing by another person, for example a relative or friend. The Hearing is not a legal proceeding and so legal representation is not necessary. If you do wish to be accompanied by someone who is legally qualified, you should confirm this in your initial request for a Hearing.
- 3.3 A copy of the bundle of documents to be considered by the Complaints Panel will be circulated to all parties at least three working days prior to the Hearing.

4 Composition of the Complaints Panel

- 4.1 The Complaints Panel will normally comprise three individuals who have no detailed prior knowledge of the circumstances of the complaint, including at least one independent member who has no connection with the governance, management or running of the School.
- 4.2 The parents will be informed who has been appointed to sit on the Complaints Panel ahead of the Hearing.
- 4.3 The Complaints Panel members will appoint one of themselves to be the Chair of the Panel throughout the proceedings.

5 The Hearing

- 5.1 The Hearing will be conducted in an informal manner.
- 5.2 The parties shall have the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in an appropriate manner. The Hearing is not a legal proceeding, and the Complaints Panel shall be under no obligation to hear oral evidence from witnesses but may do so and / or may take written statements into account.
- 5.3 All statements made at the Hearing will be unsworn. All present will be entitled, should they wish, to write their own notes for reference purposes. A clerk appointed by the Complaints Panel will take handwritten minutes of the proceedings.
- 5.4 The Chair may, at his / her discretion, adjourn the Hearing for further investigation of any relevant issue. This may include an adjournment to take legal advice.
- 5.5 A Hearing before the Complaints Panel is a private proceeding. No notes or other records or oral statements about any matter discussed in or arising from the proceeding shall be made available directly or indirectly to the press or other media.

6 The decision

- 6.1 The decision, findings and any recommendations will be confirmed in writing to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, within five

working days of the Hearing. The decisions, findings and any recommendations will also be available for inspection on the School premises by the proprietor and the Principal.

- 6.2 The completion of Stage 3 represents the conclusion of the School's Complaints Procedure.