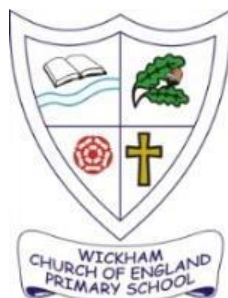


WICKHAM CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL



Complaints Procedure

Wickham Church of England Primary School has a staged procedure for dealing with complaints about general school issues, the National Curriculum, religious education, or related matters. The procedure for dealing with complaints operates at four levels, as follows:

Stage 1 - Informal Approach

Relationships with parents and carers or children attending the school are valued. Consequently, the school offers a range of opportunities during the year for parents and carers to meet with teachers to discuss any concerns they have about their child's progress or arrangements for learning. However, concerns may arise at other times, and in this case, parents and carers should contact the school as soon as possible after an incident arises and ask to discuss the matter with an appropriate member of staff. The school operates an 'open door' policy for parents and carers to speak to class teachers at the earliest opportunity if any concerns arise. Through this approach the school hopes to achieve a satisfactory resolution informally for all parties as soon as possible. Should this not be the case, the next stages of the process are as follows:

Stage 2 (formal) - Complaint heard by Headteacher

If the matter has not been resolved informally, the parent or carer will be advised to write to the Headteacher, giving details of the concern. The Headteacher will look into the complaint and respond accordingly, verbally or in writing, as soon as possible and within a maximum of 5 working days.

If the complaint requires an in-depth investigation, the Headteacher will acknowledge this and let the complainant know that a full response will take longer than usual. A response will be made within a maximum of 20 working days. After any meeting with parents and carers, the Headteacher will summarise the main points discussed in a follow-up letter which will help prevent any misunderstandings and ensure that all parties have a clear record of progress or agreements.

In most cases, the complaint will be dealt with satisfactorily at this stage.

Stage 3 (formal) – Complaint heard by Chair of Governors

Complaints against the Headteacher are usually dealt with by the Chair of Governors, in which case this would be the first formal stage.

For other complaints, if a parent or carer remains dissatisfied after the previous stages the Headteacher will refer them to the Chair of Governors.

At both stages 2 and 3 the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will keep written/typed, signed and dated records of all meetings and telephone conversations, and other related documentation. If the complaint is against a member of staff, it will be dealt with under the school's internal confidential procedures, as required by law.

Once all the relevant facts have been established, a written response to the complaint will be made. This will give a full explanation of the Headteacher's or Chair of Governors' decision and the reasons for it. If follow-up action is needed, this will be indicated. The parent or carer may be invited to a meeting to discuss the outcome as part of the school's commitment to building and maintaining good relations.

If the complaint still remains unresolved it may be necessary to move to stage 4 below.

Closure of complaints

Very occasionally, a school will feel that it needs, regretfully, to close a complaint where the complainant is still dissatisfied. Whilst everything will be done to help resolve a complaint against the school sometimes it is simply not possible to meet all of the complainant's wishes and will be a case of "agreeing to disagree".

If a complainant persists in making representations to the school – to the Headteacher, designated governor, Chair of Governors or anyone else – this can be extremely time-consuming and can detract from the responsibility to look after the interests of all the children.

For this reason, the school is entitled to close correspondence (including personal approaches, as well as letters and telephone calls) on a complaint where it is felt that all reasonable action has been taken to resolve the complaint.

Stage 4 (formal) – The Governing Body's Complaints Appeal Panel

If the complaint has already been through Stages 1, 2 and 3 and remains unresolved, the Chair of Governors will instruct the Clerk to set up a Governing Body's complaints appeal panel to consider it. The governors' appeal hearing is the last school-based stage of the complaints process, and is not convened merely to rubber-stamp previous decisions.

The Clerk to the Governing Body will arrange a meeting within 20 working days of the request and inform the parents or carers about the process and agenda.

The complaints panel will consist of 3 governors with no previous involvement in the matter. Individual complaints will not be heard by the whole Governing Body at any stage, as this could compromise the impartiality of any panel set up for a disciplinary hearing against a member of staff following a serious complaint. For complaints specifically about the national curriculum,

religious education and related matters, members will, where possible, be drawn from the Governors Standards and Outcomes Committee.

The aim of a complaints review panel is to resolve the complaint and to achieve reconciliation between the school and complainant. It should be understood that governors' powers are limited and, in some circumstances, that the complaint will only be *reviewed* rather than *reconsidered*.

Review: Many of the actions taken or decisions made by a Headteacher are entirely within the Headteacher's own remit and professional terms and conditions of service. In these cases the governors do not have the power to overturn the decision or direct a Headteacher to change a decision/action. The Chair of Governors does not have the power to consider afresh the complaint itself. The main function of the complaints panel in these circumstances will be to ensure that the complaint has been properly handled by the Headteacher (and Chair of Governors); that a sufficiently comprehensive investigation has been carried out; that all information available at the time has been considered and/or the correct procedures/policies have been adhered to. Additionally, it will look at how the school has tried to resolve the disagreement.

The panel will also *review* whether the Headteacher has acted 'reasonably', that is, was the Headteacher's response one within a reasonable *range* of responses that might have been made, for example, by other Headteachers in the same circumstances.

Reconsideration (considering afresh)

Some matters can be considered 'afresh' by governors. These may relate to a matter which has been delegated to the Headteacher but is a governing body's responsibility. In these less common circumstances, the panel can *reconsider* the matter and make its own decision. In doing so, it can take into account any new information that may not have been previously available to the Headteacher.

Parents and carers will be given the opportunity to submit additional supporting information prior to the meeting. Witness statements can be included and witnesses may be invited to give evidence in person. The Panel will then meet with all parties to consider both written and oral submissions.

During the meeting the governors will ask questions of all parties in order to obtain a balanced and considered view.

The chair of the panel will ensure that the meeting is properly minuted. Any decision to share the minutes with the complainant is a matter for the panel's discretion. There is no automatic right to see or receive a copy. Since such minutes usually name individuals, they are understandably of a sensitive and, therefore, confidential nature.

After the meeting the panel will consider the complaint and all the evidence presented in order to:

- dismiss the complaint in whole or in part
- uphold the complaint in whole or in part
- decide on the appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint

- recommend changes to the school's systems or procedures to ensure that problems of a similar nature do not recur.

The complainants will be notified of the Panel's decision, in writing, with the panel's response as soon as possible and within a maximum of 5 working days. The response will explain if there are any further rights of appeal and, if so, to whom they need to be addressed.

This is the end of the school's internal complaints procedure.

The Secretary of State

If a parent wishes to pursue a complaint because they feel a school has acted unreasonably, they can write to the Secretary of State.

Abusive Complaints

Verbal and physical aggression will not be tolerated by the school. All parties are entitled to courtesy and respect. In such instances the school will restrict further contact to senior staff only, insist that such behaviour stops and consider reporting the matter to the police. Repeated aggressive contacts will be reported to the police.

Anonymous Complaints

In general anonymous complaints will be ignored by the school unless there is evidence that the issue and the fear of identification are genuine or that the issue is one of Child Protection.

Notes:

Role of Governors

Where, in the first instance, a complaint is made to a governor the next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure to be followed. Governors will not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal complaints procedure or be involved at an early stage.

Appendix 1 - Complaints Form

Procedure written by the Resources Committee of the Governing Body in January 2016
Based on the DfE School Complaints Procedure Toolkit 2016 and HCC Good Practice Guidance.

WICKHAM CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

Complaints Form

When we receive a complaint, we aim to acknowledge its receipt within 5 days and send a full or interim response within 20 days.

Name of parent or carer:

Pupil's name:

Address:

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Telephone (day): Telephone (evening):

What is your concern and how has it affected you?

Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please list this below:

Have you discussed this matter with a member of staff before filling in this form?

If so, who did you speak to and what was the response?

What would you like to happen as a result of making this complaint?

Signature: Date:

Official use only

Initial response and acknowledgement

By whom:

Date:

Complaints reference number:

Action taken:

Date