

Complaints Procedure

Rationale

At Watergate we aim to provide a happy, caring, family environment in order to develop good behaviour, confidence and independence in our children. We are committed to encouraging the involvement of parents in the community of the school and in their children's education.

At Watergate we accept that, from time to time, things may occur which cause parents concern and we aim to ensure that parents and the school community know what steps to take to make sure that any problem is resolved satisfactorily.

Aims

- *To provide an accessible and easily understood procedure for complaints*
- *To resolve concerns through informal discussions at the earliest stage*
- *To aid communications between parents and school*
- *To provide a fair and transparent investigative process for the whole school community*

Implementation of Policy

Watergate school adopts the following staged approach to complaints.

Preliminary Stage – An Informal Approach

- The vast majority of concerns and complaints can be resolved informally and a satisfactory resolution achieved for all parties at the earliest opportunity.
- Under normal circumstances, parents should speak informally with the class teacher, or other senior member of staff involved, as soon as possible if they have a concern. If they, or the class teacher, feel that any discussion may take more time than is immediately available, or require a confidential setting, it would be appropriate for them to make an appointment to meet at a mutually convenient time, when the matter can be discussed in an appropriate environment.
- If the concern is about the headteacher, parents should have preliminary discussions with the Headteacher. However, in exceptional circumstances, they may wish to approach the chair of governors. If the concern is about a governor, parents should have preliminary discussions with that governor. However, in exceptional circumstances, they may again wish to approach the chair of governors.
- Parents should be aware that if they do not talk to the person directly concerned with the matter, they may be advised to do so and that person will be informed of any concern or any complaint against them.
- Any concern will be taken seriously and will be dealt with sensitively and as confidentially as possible. If the class teacher cannot deal with the matter immediately, she/he will make a note of the date and nature of the discussion and will

make it clear to the parent what action will be taken and when they should expect to hear further. Most concerns are dealt with informally to everyone's satisfaction. If no satisfactory solution has been found in 10 school days, parents will then be advised by the Headteacher of the next step in the process.

Stage 1 – The Headteacher

- At Watergate when an informal stage has not been concluded satisfactorily, parents are advised to write to the headteacher, giving details of the complaint and enclosing any appropriate paperwork, stating whether the matter has been discussed with the class teacher and what the response was.
- The Headteacher will respond in writing within five school days acknowledging the complaint or offering a full response. The headteacher will keep a written record of meetings and after any meeting at which a concern or complaint about any member of staff is discussed, a follow-up letter will be sent to the parents to summarise the main points discussed. This is to prevent any misunderstanding and to record progress or agreement. It is hoped to respond to the complaint in full within 10 school days. If, however, the complaint requires an in-depth investigation the headteacher will acknowledge this and let the parents know that a full response will take longer than usual but should be available within 20 school days.
- If parents remain dissatisfied following the Headteachers final response, they will then be advised by the Headteacher of the next step in the process.

Stage 2 – Chair Of Governors

- At Watergate the chair of governors is in the position to be independent and impartial. Parents should send a letter to her only, outlining their complaint, explaining the reason for pursuing it beyond the Headteacher's response and enclosing any relevant paperwork. They should not discuss the issue with any other governor as this may make it difficult to set up a panel of governors who have no prior involvement should the matter need to be taken a further stage.
- The chair of governors will speak with the Headteacher and may meet with all parties to try to resolve the complaint.
- Where possible, the chair will acknowledge within five days. Record keeping and timescale for responding to parents will be assigned to the Headteacher. The chair will agree to hold discussions with the Headteacher. These discussions are key to resolving the complaint and agreeing a way forward.
- The chair will decide whether the issue relates to responsibilities that are delegated to the Headteacher by the governing body, fall within the governing body's remit only or are within the Headteacher's terms and conditions of employment. This decision will determine what powers are available to the governors and therefore what action they can take (see Stage 3 below). Advice will be sought from the LA.
- In the rare circumstance that parents are unhappy with the outcome, the chair of governors will offer a right of appeal to the governing body's complaints panel.

Stage 3 – Governing Body's Complaints Panel

It is very rare for a complaint to reach this stage. If it does, the next step in the process will involve an independent and impartial review by a panel of three governors.

Parents who wish to appeal to the governors should request this in writing to the clerk of the governing body. Parents should describe the issue in detail and say why they are dissatisfied with the outcome of the previous stages.

There are two forms of appeal:

- *Reconsideration (considering afresh): When the issue relates to delegated responsibilities, the panel can reconsider the matter, that is, look at the matter afresh, with any new information that the Headteacher may not have been aware of at the time of the original response or action. In light of additional information, the panel may decide to write and ask the Headteacher to give the matter further consideration. Complaints about a governor should also be subject to a reconsideration of issues.*
- *Review: If the matter falls within the Headteacher's decision-making remit by virtue of her terms and conditions of employment, then the panel will only have the power to review the decision, not to consider the matter afresh. Any new evidence will be referred back to the Headteacher, who may consider amending the decision in light of that new information.*

The clerk will arrange and facilitate the meeting. The panel will consist of three governors with no prior involvement in the matter and the chair will be designated by the panel. The meeting will be held in an informal atmosphere with all parties present but will follow a formal agenda

The clerk will inform the parent in writing of the panel's decision at the earliest opportunity following the meeting. The letter will include

- *a summary of the issues*
- *an outline of the main points of discussion*
- *the reasons for the decision*
- *proposed actions or outcomes.*

It may also suggest that parents meet the Headteacher again to agree a way forward and that for issues relating to the national curriculum or the provision of religious education, parents may appeal further to the Local Authority.

For general complaints this is the final stage of the school's complaints procedure. If a parent believes that the Headteacher's and governors' actions have been unreasonable or the correct process has not been adhered to, the only recourse is to the Secretary of State.