

Complaints Procedure

For Current Parents and Service Users

Aims

George Watson's College is committed to providing high-quality services. It prides itself on close and supportive relationships with parents and always seeks to do the right thing for every child and for the school as a whole. GWC deals with complaints in an open and positive manner and aims for any issue to be resolved quickly, informally and in the spirit of partnership working wherever possible.

Who can use this procedure?

This procedure applies to the following, who are hereafter referred to as the Complainant.

- Parents of current pupils in the Senior or Junior School
- Users of paid-for GWC services including Galleon members, Swim School customers and Event Hire customers.

This procedure does not apply to:

- Parents of prospective pupils (including those who have accepted a place at the School in respect of their child but where a child has not started the School).
- Issues relating to George Watson's Family Foundation which are dealt with by a separate procedure (www.watsonians.org/moreinfo).
- Issues relating to The Watsonian Club, which should be referred by email to development@gwc.org.uk for the attention of the President.
- A grievance by a member of staff, which is eligible for handling through the Staff Grievance Procedure.
- Issues relating to Financial Assistance decisions of prospective pupils
- An appeal relating to Admissions. Please refer to the [Admissions Policy](#).
- An appeal related to Exclusion. Please refer to the [Pupil Attendance, Uniform and Discipline Policy](#).
- A concern related to Charity Law. This should be referred to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).
- Complaints relating to non-recent abuse which will be dealt with under our [Historic Allegations Policy](#).
- Concerns and Complaints from members of the public, although those are welcomed and responded to as part of our ongoing Stakeholder Engagement.

Policy Statement

We welcome all feedback from parents, staff, young people and users of any GWC service as this provides valuable input to the constant improvement of our school. Views are gathered through a range of channels including regular surveys and engagement events. Concerns, criticism and complaints will therefore be received by George Watson's College in a positive manner and this includes responding constructively to complaints within the scope of this policy.

- We ask Complainants to be respectful when raising concerns.
- We will seek firstly to resolve matters informally and in the spirit of partnership, although we recognise that it may be appropriate for some more serious matters to be dealt with formally from the outset.
- We seek to resolve issues in a streamlined and efficient way, recognising the importance of a swift resolution for Complainants and the need for staff to focus on their core role, particularly where this relates to the education and care of children.
- When necessary, more time may be taken to ensure a thorough or detailed response, or to seek external or specialised advice or mediation.
- Complainants will be kept informed of progress.

Procedure

Timeframes

Complaints should be made as quickly as possible following the relevant matter or occurrence, normally within a few days or weeks. It will not normally be possible to process complaints received more than six months after an event.

Complaints will be handled as quickly as possible, and guidance is given within this policy of normal response times. If a complaint arrives at the end of term or during the holidays, the School will do all that is reasonably necessary to resolve the issue quickly once term has resumed.

Informal Resolution

The majority of complaints are dealt with informally. In the first instance, any user of our service is encouraged to make contact with the relevant member of staff. This is usually the Form teacher, Head of Department or the member of staff directly involved. Staff will normally acknowledge emails, letters or phone calls within two working days¹ of their receipt. Staff will work in partnership with the complainant to detail how they propose to resolve the issue as quickly as possible and normally within five working days of acknowledgement.

Formal Resolution (Stage 1)

Complaints which cannot be resolved informally (see above) may be dealt with using the Formal Resolution procedure. Complaints which are of a particularly serious nature may also go straight to Formal Resolution.

Complainants should direct Formal Complaints either by email (info@gwc.org.uk) or by using the online form found on our website ([Complaints Form](#)). The email or form should include full details of the original issue, evidence and/or explanation of why the original response was unacceptable to the Complainant (if initially dealt with informally) and the desired resolution. The complaint will be acknowledged by the school's Complaint Manager or their designate within two working days.

Formal complaints will be overseen and responded to by a member of the relevant Leadership Team (Junior School, Senior School, Operations) or another suitably senior member of staff, the Complaint Hearer.

The Complaint Hearer will determine how best to proceed with the complaint, taking into account the need to

- Seek any further information from the Complainant
- Gather information from staff, pupils or third parties
- Review other documentation or data sources

Once this has taken place, the Complaint Hearer will decide on the outcome of the complaint and the Complainant will be informed. Formal Complaints will normally be concluded, and the outcome communicated to the Complainant, within twenty working days. On occasions, the School may need to extend the timeframe and the Complainant should receive notice of this.

If the Complainant is not satisfied with the outcome at Stage 1, they may proceed to Stage 2 of this procedure which is known as the Appeal Stage.

Formal Resolution (Stage 2 - Appeal)

Complainants who are dissatisfied by the outcome of Formal Resolution Stage 1 should write to the Principal (principal@gwc.org.uk) who will either hear the appeal themselves or appoint someone from the Watson's Leadership Team (WLT) to hear the appeal (the Appeal Hearer). Appeals must be made in writing and within 10 working days of the outcome of Stage 1.

If possible, the Appeal Hearer will try to resolve the issue immediately without the need for further investigation. Where this is not possible, they will decide how any further investigation should be carried out. At the discretion of the Appeal Hearer, a Panel may be convened to discuss the complaint and reconsider the decision. This would

¹ Working days are term-time, Monday to Friday

include such staff and, if appropriate Governor(s), as determined by the Appeal Hearer. Appeals will normally be concluded, and the outcome communicated to the Complainant, within twenty working days.

Involving Governing Council

In line with [Scottish Government guidance on Complaint Handling](#), complainants who are dissatisfied by the outcome of Formal Resolution Stage 2 may wish to raise their concern with the Governing Council. They should do so by writing (within 10 working days of the outcome of the Stage 2 Appeal) to the Chair of the Governing Council (chair@gwc.org.uk) who will consider the case and decide if any further action is required. In their considerations, the Chair may refer to any relevant national or sector guidance, or may seek counsel from a variety of sources such as school staff, SCIS, HMC, ISBA, AGBIS, The Merchant Company Education Board, the Registrar of Independent Schools, The General Teaching Council for Scotland, Education Scotland, or The Care Inspectorate.

Consideration from the Governing Council will normally be concluded, and any outcome communicated to the Complainant, within twenty working days. The decision of the Chair of the Governing Council about what further action, if any, to take, is final.

Complaints about the Principal

If the complaint is against the Principal, the complaint should be submitted in writing to the Chair of the Governing Council (chair@gwc.org.uk) who will appoint an appropriate member of the Governing Council to handle the issue either informally or under the Formal Resolution (Stage 1) process outlined above. Any Stage 2 Appeal would then be heard by the Chair of the Governing Council.

Storage of Complaint Information

Documentation connected to Informal Complaint will be kept by the person managing the complaint in line with the school's normal data retention (e.g. emails received or sent, together with notes of any conversations along with details of the resolution reached) including on the School's Management Information System.

All formal complaints will be recorded on the Complaints Register which can be accessed by members of WLT and the Complaints Manager. A summary of findings with all relevant documentation and communication should be stored.

Confidentiality

Complainants can be assured that all concerns and complaints will be treated in a sensitive and compassionate manner. Knowledge of the complaint will be limited to those directly involved and to such senior leaders of the School as necessary. Where a complaint raised against a pupil or member of staff has been upheld, the Complainant may be advised of this, although no details will be shared.

Review

This policy will be reviewed every two years.

Date of next review: January 2027

Related Policies, Documentation and Legislation

Policies and Documents

- [Historic Allegations Policy](#)
- [Pupil Attendance, Uniform and Discipline Policy](#) (includes Codes of Conduct for Pupils)
- Grievance Policy (staff access only)
- [Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy](#)
- [Dignity and Respect Policy](#)
- [Admissions Policy](#)
- [Privacy Policy: Contacting Us](#).

Legislation

The Children & Young People (Scotland) Act 2014

The Data Protection Act, 2018 and the UK General Data Protection Regulation

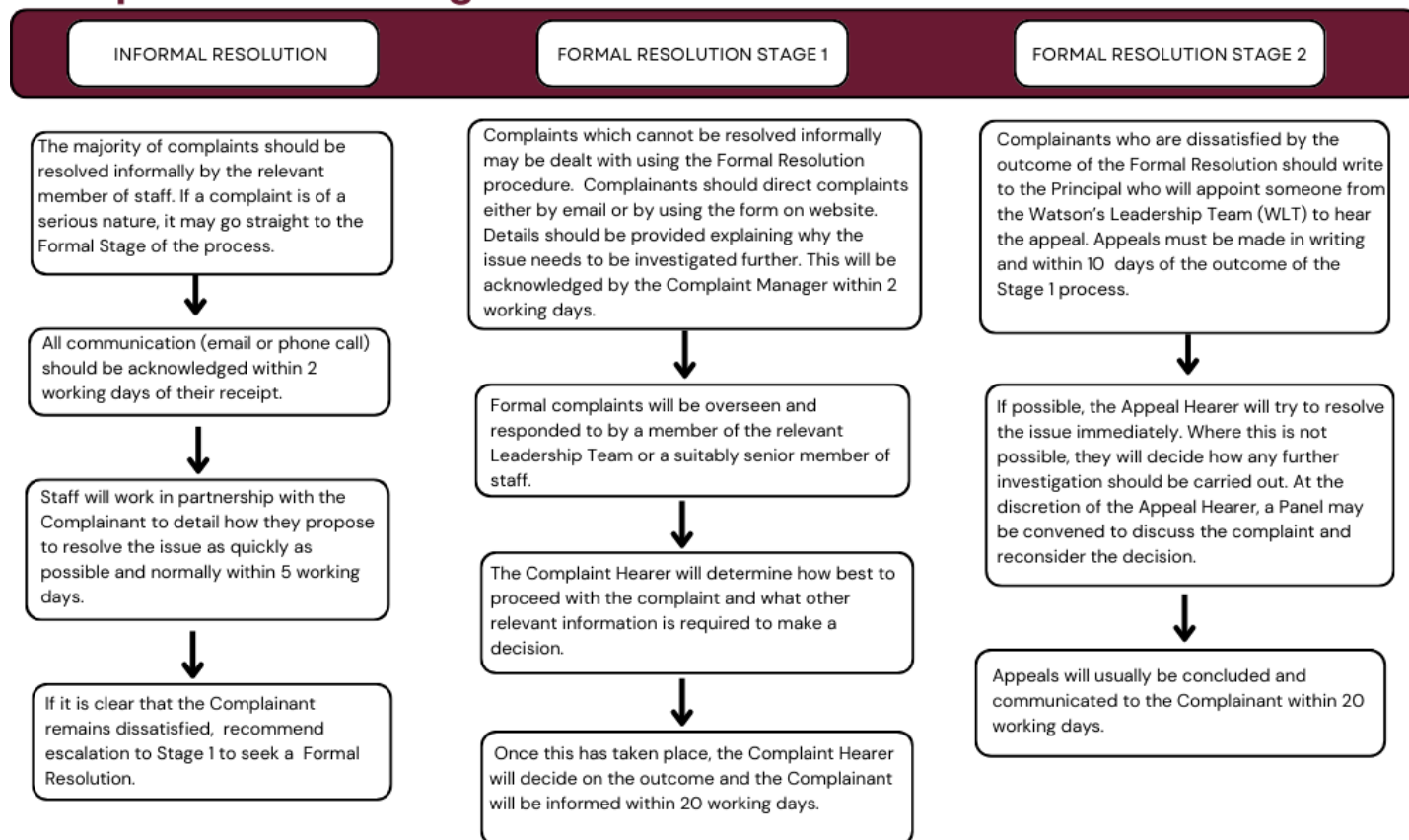
Education (Scotland) Act 1980

Appendices

1. Complaint Handling Procedure - Flowchart.
2. Guidance for carrying out a Stage 1 Formal complaint (internal document)

APPENDIX 1

Complaints Handling Procedure Flowchart



If the complaint is against the Principal, the complaint should be submitted in writing to the Chair of the Governing Council who will appoint an appropriate member of the Governing Council to handle the issue.

Involving Governing Council: If a Complainant is unhappy with the outcome of the Formal Resolution Stage 2 process, contact can be made to the Chair of the Governing Council within 10 days of the outcome from this process.