

WHITGIFT SCHOOL

FORMAL COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

Colleagues responsible for this policy:

Toby Seth (Headmaster)

Reviewed by Whitgift Governors: October 2024

Most recent review: August 2026

Next review: August 2027

Introduction

Whitgift 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.

Complaints may be submitted via Microsoft Form - using [THIS](#) link or in writing.

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

The School will make every effort to meet the timescales set out in this Policy. If, for any reason, it is not possible to do so the School will communicate a revised timetable to the parent concerned together with any reason for the delay.

The School will treat all confidential information appropriately. It is important that participants in the investigation of a complaint feel able to give a full and honest account of events.

As set out in the School's Terms & Conditions, except as required by law, the School and its staff will not disclose confidential information. In many cases, the School will be under a specific legal obligation not to disclose such information. This means that documents relating to the investigation of a complaint such as correspondence, meeting/interview notes, disciplinary records and other documents containing confidential, personal or sensitive information (such as those which identify an interviewee) will not generally be made available to parents in relation to a complaint they have raised.

The relevant decision maker(s) in the complaints process will have access to all relevant documents and parents will be provided with a copy of the final decision and the reasons for that decision.

For more information about the School's use of personal information and its related legal obligations, please refer to the Privacy Notice (available on the School's website).

Complaints must reflect the genuine views and experiences of the complainant. Where a complaint has evidently been generated by artificial intelligence (AI) and does not represent the complainant's own account, the School may require it to be resubmitted before it is considered, or it will be summarily dismissed.

If an anonymous complaint is received, this will be directed to an appropriate member of the School's management team to consider the complaint and assess whether any action is required to investigate the complaint.

Well-being related and/or Safeguarding Incidents

It is inevitable that some incidents or issues will be of more general interest and concern to others not directly involved. Well-being related and/or safeguarding incidents (including bullying) may occur in the School. For reasons of confidentiality and for the welfare of the children involved, the School's response and subsequent actions to address these issues will not generally be shared until it is appropriate to do so.

The School will act appropriately and robustly however the general School community may not necessarily be aware of the actions it has undertaken. Apart from those external agencies which we must inform and consult, third parties will not normally be informed what steps are being taken in an individual case. We seek to establish an understanding of and confidence in our safeguarding practices by outlining our likely approach and the constraints placed upon us to reassure all parties that we will act appropriately in respect of an individual case. We do this by sharing how we deal with safeguarding incidents with pupils and parents through the publication of policies, induction, talks, assemblies and lessons, especially Ideatum lessons.

Financial matters

Financial matters may be referred directly to the John Whitgift Foundation in the first instance. The raising of a complaint, including where it is linked to a pupil leaving the School or to notice arrangements, does not of itself affect parents' contractual obligations to pay Fees (including Fees in lieu of notice) under the JWF Terms & Conditions. Any complaint (or aspect of a complaint) relating to financial matters including fees will be referred to the John Whitgift Foundation.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

- It is hoped that most complaints and concerns will be resolved quickly and informally. During Term Time an initial and holding response should be received, where possible, within 2 working days.
- If parents have a complaint they can raise this either via the Microsoft Form provided in the Introduction section above, or with any member of staff (in writing). In this situation

it would be most typical for them to contact their son's Head of Year who, if appropriate, will liaise with Heads of Department, Directors of Sections or relevant colleagues on the Senior Leadership and Executive Teams.. 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 him/her to consult the Senior Deputy.

- Complaints made directly to the Headmaster or Senior Deputy will usually be referred to an appropriate colleague – such as the relevant Head of Year - unless the Headmaster or Senior Deputy deems it appropriate to deal with the matter personally.
- That colleague assigned to address the complaint will keep written notes regarding any complaint received. Should the matter not be resolved within ten working days or in the event that the investigation process fails 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 but may be recorded on the low level concerns log if appropriate.
- If the complaint is against the Headmaster, parents should refer their complaint (whether informal or formal) to the Chairman of the Whitgift School Committee.
- Any complaint (whether informal or formal) concerning the Board of Governors, any individual Governor or the Chair of Governors, should be directed to the Clerk to the Governors at the John Whitgift Foundation.

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 Headmaster. The Headmaster, in conjunction with senior staff will decide, after considering the complaint, the appropriate course of action. 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. On occasion, the Headmaster may decide proactively to progress a concern through this route and will inform parents of this and the reasons for this decision.
- The Headmaster, or other member senior staff (Executive or Senior Leadership Team), 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 further investigations to be carried out and a senior member of staff will be appointed to consider the complaint.
- The appointed member of staff will keep written records of all meetings and interviews held in relation to the complaint. These will be relayed to the Headmaster or Senior Deputy.
- Once the appointed member of staff 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. Reasons will be provided for this

decision. If the Headmaster is not taking the decision himself, he will be informed of the outcome and decision.

- The period of time between 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.
- Should the Headmaster have concerns as to the validity of the complaint, he reserves the right to refer the matter directly to the Chairman of the Court of Governors. Examples of a complaint which may be considered to be invalid include:
 - The complainant is not a current parent, or the complaint concerns a matter which should reasonably have been raised whilst the pupil was at the school
 - The complaint concerns a matter which occurred more than a year previously and could reasonably have been 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.
- If the complaint is about the Headmaster, then parents should put their complaint in writing to the Chairman of the Whitgift School Committee.
- Any complaint (whether informal or formal) concerning the Board of Governors, any individual Governor or the Chair of Governors, should be directed to the Clerk to the Governors at the John Whitgift Foundation.

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 Headmaster'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 Headmaster'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 Headmaster'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 Headmaster and if necessary to the Chairman of the Governors of the Court of John Whitgift Foundation. Where such a stay is granted, the Headmaster or the Chairman may, where he considers 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 Headmaster, 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 Senior Deputy and includes any complaint which reached the Senior Leadership Team and/or Executive Team, whether informal or formal.

In the last academic year 2025-6, there were 3 formal complaints.

Managing serial and unreasonable complaints

Whitgift is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with our School. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

(a) The School defines unreasonable behaviour as that which hinders our consideration of complaints because of the frequency or nature of the complainant's contact with the School, such as, if the complainant:

- i. refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance
- ii. refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process
- iii. refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of the complaints procedure
- iv. insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the complaints procedure or with good practice
- v. introduces trivial or irrelevant information which they expect to be taken into account and commented on
- vi. raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales
- vii. makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced
- viii. changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds
- ix. repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed)
- x. refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the School's complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed
- xi. seeks an unrealistic outcome
- xii. makes excessive demands on School time by frequent, lengthy and complicated contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with
- xiii. uses threats to intimidate
- xiv. uses abusive, offensive or discriminatory language or violence
- xv. knowingly provides falsified information
- xvi. publishes unacceptable information on social media or other public forums.

(b) Complainants should try to limit their communication with the School that relates to their complaint, while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text), as it could delay the outcome being reached.

(c) Whenever possible, the Headmaster or Chairman of the Whitgift School Committee will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

(d) If the behaviour continues, the Headmaster will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and ask them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact the School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will be reviewed after six months.

(e) In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our actions in writing. This may include barring an individual from the School.

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 Chair of the Court of Governors of John Whitgift Foundation is Mrs Fiona Fletcher-Smith.

Address:
c/o the Clerk
John Whitgift Foundation
North End
Croydon
CR9 1SS

Tel 020 8680 8499