

THE WESTGATE SCHOOL

Hampshire's First 4-16 'All Through' School

*"The Westgate School is a community of learners where partnerships inspire success for all:
learning together – achieving excellence"*

Headteacher: Mrs F A Dean, MA (Ed)

Initial Policy date	2003	Next scheduled review	July 2023
Governor approved	July 2021	Key person/people	HT/Governors
Model Policy		Model localised	Yes
Pupil leadership team review		Y / N / N/A	

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

PART 1

Principles:

The Westgate School believes in taking a positive approach to complaints, which are made in an appropriate way, and recognises that mistakes can sometimes be made. The School is willing to take action and make changes when necessary to benefit the daily operation and the ethos of the School.

The Westgate School places great importance on partnership and to that end Parent/Carers need to know that the school will look seriously at any complaint and that appropriate action will be taken if a complaint is upheld. The School discourages the use of social media as a means by which to raise a concern about its provision as this does not facilitate effective partnership or understanding.

This policy applies specifically to complaints rather than concerns. If there is a concern about an aspect of the School, this should in the first instance be taken up with the relevant member of staff. We encourage parents/carers to approach staff with any concerns and aim to resolve issues through open dialogue and mutual understanding. If a concern cannot be satisfactorily resolved, parents/carers may wish to make a formal complaint using this process.

The Schools aims:

- To achieve satisfactory communication with Parent/Carer whenever dissatisfaction is felt.
- To try to ensure that pupil and school issues are dealt with on a just, equitable and sensitive basis.
- To try to ensure that complaints remain a rare occurrence through dealing appropriately with any concerns that are raised.

Practice and Procedure:

- Every attempt will be made to deal promptly and in-house with a formal complaint. As a guideline complaints will be investigated and a reply sent to the Parent/Carer within 10 school days of receipt. Initial complaints can be in the most convenient form for the Parent/Carer. Most things can be sorted out by talking to the person(s)

concerned. Parent/Carers may need to make an appointment (via the school office). Complaints may also be in writing or by email to contact@westgate.hants.sch.uk

- Each complaint will be treated seriously, avoiding hasty assumptions. Complaints will be investigated by an appropriate member of staff who has had no previous involvement in the matter. Typically this will be a member of the Senior Leadership Team or Year Leader/Faculty Leader/Subject Leader. Parent/Carers may be asked to give evidence to the investigator and in that case they may be accompanied by a friend or colleague if they wish.
- The Headteacher will make the Chair of Governors aware of any formal complaint he/she feels is sufficiently serious and possibly grounded in fact to warrant such action.
- Any complaint relating to Child Protection, Safeguarding or GDPR will be passed without delay to the School's Designated Safeguarding Lead or Data Protection Officer for the appropriate lines of action to be followed.
- If a complaint relates to Health and Safety, the School's Health and Safety Officer/Site and Facilities Strategic Lead will be involved.
- The official Hampshire procedure regarding support and disciplinary action will be used as and when necessary.
- The School will keep a log of formal complaints together with an indication as to the outcome.

Please see annexe to this policy regarding unreasonably persistent complaints, harassment or aggression.

Procedures:

- a) Any concern raised will be dealt with initially by the appropriate member of staff. If a satisfactory resolution is not achieved, the concern should be escalated to the Headteacher who will investigate fully and respond according;
- b) Where an informal resolution has not been achieved by the Headteacher, or the complainant feels it necessary to do so without seeking informal resolution, the matter will move to Stage 1 – Investigation and Complaint

Formal Complaint:

- c) **Stage 1 – Investigation:** complaint should ideally be expressed in writing and addressed to either the Headteacher and/or Chair of Governors. The person complaining can expect that:-
 - i) It will be taken seriously;
 - ii) Communication during the investigation will be a priority;
 - iii) The School will be objective and transparent in its investigation;
 - iv) Ask for complainant to define the outcome that they are seeking;
 - v) Take in to account the views of the staff involved and what can reasonably be expected of them according to role and resource;
 - vi) Set clear expectations about the process.

A formal, written response from the Headteacher and Chair of Governors will be provided as a result of the investigation and agreed actions.

d) Stage 2 – Governing Body Complaints Committee:

If the matter has not been resolved after Stage 1, the complainant may request a Stage 2 – Governors’ complaints committee. The committee will review the evidence and in partnership with the Headteacher, review the School’s policies and practice where it is believed there may have been a shortfall.

Governors do not have the power to overturn decisions or direct the Headteacher to change a decision or action that sits within the Headteacher’s remit and professional terms and conditions of service. However, working in partnership with the Headteacher, Governors will review the investigation and make recommendations where appropriate.

In the event of a complaint being heard by a Governor Committee, DfE recommends that neither party brings legal representative.

The Westgate School does not allow the recording of meetings except in note form; electronic evidence of recorded meetings will not be accepted by the School.

The Westgate School will enable reasonable adjustments to any person needing these in order to make representation – this may include: large print for documents; use of hearing devices if provided. Please make the Clerk to Governors/Headteacher’s PA aware as soon as possible and ideally, 3/5 school days before any meetings take place.

If the complaint is:

- jointly about the Chair and Vice Chair or
- the entire governing body or
- the majority of the governing body

Stage 1 will be considered by an independent investigator appointed by the governing body. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent investigator will provide a formal written response.

Annexe A – re persistent complaints

Annexe B – re overview of process

Annexe C – re flow chart and recommended procedures

Complaints Policy: Annexe A

Policy for dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complaints, Harassment or Aggression

The Headteacher and staff deal with specific concerns as part of their day-to-day management of the school in accordance with the School's Complaints Procedure and practice of working in partnership with families.

The majority of concerns are handled in an informal manner and are resolved quickly, sensitively and to the satisfaction of the complainant. The school is extremely committed to promoting positive relationships with all members of the school community, regardless of age, gender, religion, ability culture or other protected characteristic and it welcomes the opportunity to address and resolve issues that may arise.

However, there are rare occasions when complainants behave in an unreasonable manner when raising and/or pursuing concerns. The consequences are that the actions of the complainants begin to impact negatively on the day-to-day running of the school and directly or indirectly the overall well-being of the children or staff in the school. In these exceptional circumstances the school may take action in accordance with this policy.

1. The school expects anyone who wishes to raise concerns with the school to:
 - treat all members of the school community with courtesy and respect;
 - respect the needs of pupils and staff within the school;
 - avoid the use of violence, or threats of violence, towards people or property;
 - avoid any aggression or verbal abuse;
 - recognise the time constraints under which members of staff in schools work and allow the school a reasonable time to respond to a complaint;
 - recognise that resolving a specific problem can sometimes take time;
 - follow the School's complaints procedure (and for staff members to follow the appropriate internal staff procedure);
 - not use social media as a means to exert pressure on the process or make potentially defamatory remarks about members of staff

2. For the purpose of this policy, an unreasonably persistent complainant may be anyone who engages in unreasonable behaviour when making a complaint. This will include persons who pursue complaints in an unreasonable manner.

Unreasonable behaviour may include the following (not an exhaustive list):

- actions which are obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious or founded on prejudice;
- prolific correspondence or excessive e-mail or telephone contact about a concern or complaint;
- uses Freedom of Information requests excessively and unreasonably;
- an insistence upon pursuing unsubstantial complaints and/or unrealistic or unreasonable outcomes;
- an insistence upon pursuing complaints in an unreasonable manner;
- an insistence on only dealing with the Headteacher on all occasions irrespective of the issue and the level of delegation in the school to deal with such matters;
- an insistence upon repeatedly pursuing a complaint when the outcome is not satisfactory to the complainant but cannot be changed, for example, if the desired outcome is beyond the remit of the school because it is unlawful.

- making what appears to be groundless complaints about staff dealing with the complaint and seeking to have them replaced.
- abusive or threatening behaviour or language towards school staff.
- failing to specify grounds of the complaint, despite offers of assistance from the school

3. We regard harassment as including the unreasonable pursuit of issues or complaints, particularly if the matter appears to be pursued in a way intended to cause personal distress, rather than to seek a resolution.

Behaviour may fall within the scope of this policy if:

- it appears to be deliberately targeted at one or more members of school staff or others, and appears to be founded in prejudice;
- the way in which a complaint or other issue is pursued (as opposed to the complaint itself) causes undue distress to school staff or others;
- it has an unjustifiably significant and disproportionate adverse effect on the school community.

4. School's responses to unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment

This policy is intended to be used in conjunction with the School's Complaints Procedure. Taken together, these documents set out how we will always seek to work with parents, carers and others with a legitimate complaint to resolve a difficulty.

However, in cases of unreasonably persistent complaints or harassment, the school may take some or all of the following steps, as appropriate:

- inform the complainant informally that his/her behaviour is now considered by the school to be unreasonable or unacceptable, and request a changed approach;
- inform the complainant in writing that the school considers his/her behaviour to fall under the terms of the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment Policy;
- require any future meetings with a member of staff to be conducted with a second person present. In the interests of all parties, notes of these meetings may be taken;
- inform the complainant that, except in emergencies, the school will respond only to written communication and that these may be required to be channelled through a third party chosen by the school, for example the Local Authority or County Solicitor;
- inform the complainant that, with the exception of urgent communication regarding their child in school, the school will respond to their correspondence on a 6 weekly basis only;
- take legal advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation.

Legitimate new complaints will always be considered in an appropriate time frame, even if the person making them is (or has been) subject to the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment Policy. The school nevertheless reserves the right not to respond to communications from individuals whose conduct falls within the scope of this policy. Any matter that cannot be reasonably resolved through this process may be referred to the Local Authority or signposted to another establishment/organisation.

5. Physical or verbal aggression

The governing body will not tolerate any form of physical or verbal aggression against members of the school community. If there is evidence of any such aggression the school may:

- ban the individual from entering the school site, with immediate effect;
 - take legal advice on pursuing a case under Anti-Harassment legislation and defamation law;
 - call the police to remove the individual from the premises, under powers provided by the Education Act 1996.
6. Right of appeal All persons who are notified by the school that they are being dealt with under this procedure have the right of appeal. Appeals must be addressed to the Chair of Governors under confidential cover, care of the school. The Chair of Governors will consider each appeal on its merits, consulting with the Headteacher as appropriate. The outcome of the appeal should be notified to the appellant and copied to the Headteacher within 10 school days of receipt.

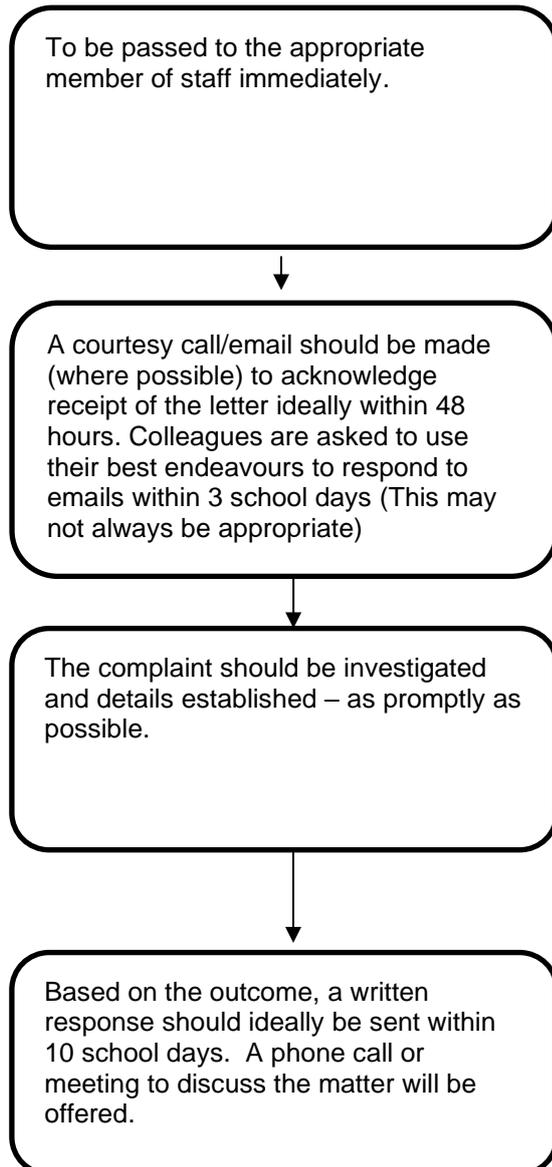
If a complainant remains unhappy with the outcome and response from the Chair of Governors, the matter may be taken up with the Local Authority or be signposted to another establishment/organisation.

Annexe B

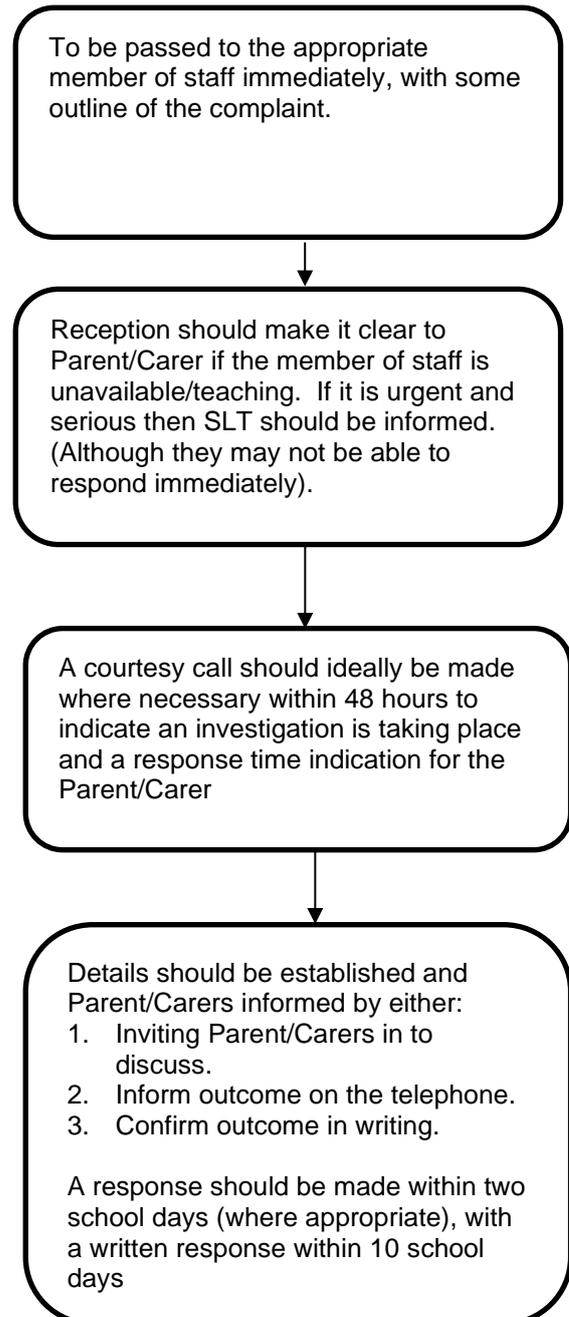
ANNEXE: PROCEDURE FOR HANDLING The Westgate School's Concerns and Formal Complaints

INITIAL RESPONSE

WRITTEN COMPLAINTS: (including emails):



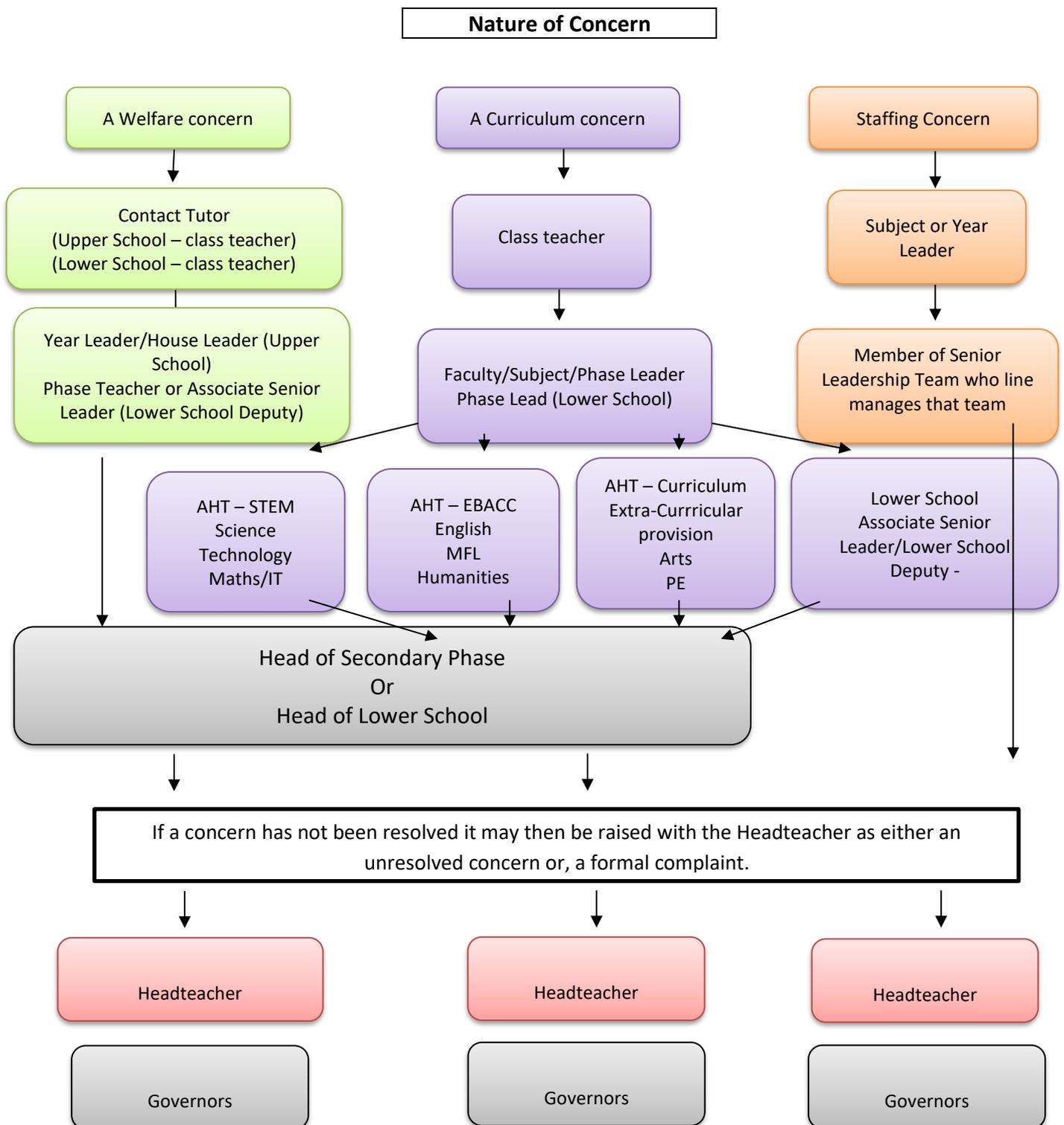
TELEPHONE COMPLAINTS:



In the event of a further complaint, Parent/Carers should be advised that they need to inform the Headteacher in writing.

Annexe C

Recommended Procedure for Parent/Carers



2. → Headteacher if not contacted under 1. and unable to resolve issue.
3. → Chair of Governors for involvement of Governing Body (Stage 1 and Stage 2).
4. → Secretary of State.