

# Whitecross Hereford: High School & Specialist Sports College

## Complaints Procedure

*(Reviewed by Leadership & Management Committee and ratified by full Governing Body on 9 December 2013)*

### Rationale

Whitecross encourages feedback from its community to help it to develop further. All members of staff, the Headteacher and the Governing Body are committed to the school motto '*Excellence for all...Excellence from all*'. To this end the school takes seriously any failures in our service which are cause for complaint.

The intention is always to resolve concerns effectively and in a timely manner with the most appropriate members of staff being involved. Where this is not possible the Complaints Procedure is designed to provide a successful resolution for all involved.

Staff should be aware that this policy does not replace the Local Authority Grievance Policy; a copy of which is available on the Herefordshire Council website.

### Purpose

This policy deals with complaints which have either escalated from an initial concern which has not been effectively dealt with or from a serious complaint about our service.

### Principles

This complaints procedure will:

- Encourage resolution of problems by informal means wherever possible;
- Be easily accessible and publicised;
- Be simple to understand and use;
- Be impartial;
- Be non-adversarial;
- Allow swift handling with established time-limits for action and keeping people informed of the progress;
- Ensure a full and fair investigation by an independent person where necessary;
- Respect people's desire for confidentiality;
- Address all the points at issue and provide an effective response and appropriate redress, where necessary;
- Provide information to the school's leadership team so that services can be improved.

### Guidelines

#### 1.1. Investigating Complaints

The person investigating the complaint will make sure that they:

- 1.1.1 establish what has happened so far, and who has been involved (appendix A);
- 1.1.2 clarify the nature of the complaint and what remains unresolved;
- 1.1.3 meet with the complainant or contact them (if unsure or further information is necessary);
- 1.1.4 clarify what the complainant feels would put things right;
- 1.1.5 interview those involved in the matter and/or those complained of, allowing them to be accompanied if they wish;

- 1.1.6 conduct the interview with an open mind and be prepared to persist in the questioning;
- 1.1.7 retain notes of the interview.

## **1.2. Resolving Complaints**

At each stage in the procedure the school will be keeping in mind ways in which a complaint can be resolved. It might be sufficient to acknowledge that the complaint is valid in whole or in part. In addition, it may be appropriate to offer one or more of the following:

- 1.2.1 an apology;
- 1.2.2 an explanation;
- 1.2.3 an admission that the situation could have been handled differently or better;
- 1.2.4 an assurance that the event complained of will not recur;
- 1.2.5 an explanation of the steps that have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again;
- 1.2.6 an undertaking to review school policies in light of the complaint.

Complainants will be encouraged to state what actions they feel might resolve the problem at any stage. An admission that the school could have handled the situation better is not the same as an admission of negligence.

The procedure will identify areas of agreement between the parties. It is also of equal importance to clarify any misunderstandings that might have occurred as this can create a positive atmosphere in which to discuss any outstanding issues.

## **1.3. Vexatious Complaint**

The effective use of this procedure should limit the number of complaints that become protracted. However, there will be occasions when, despite all stages of the procedures having been followed, the complainant remains dissatisfied. If the complainant tries to reopen the same issue, the Chair of the Governing Body will inform the complainant in writing that the procedure has been exhausted and that the matter is now closed.

### **1.3.1 Anonymous Complaints**

The Headteacher and Chair of Governors will decide whether the gravity of an anonymous complaint warrants an investigation and will not generally respond to anonymous complaints unless they consider that:

- The issue and fear of identification are genuine;
- The issue is one of child protection.

## **1.4. The Formal Procedure**

### **1.4.1 Stage 1**

Complaint heard by the relevant member of Strategy Group and the Headteacher informed of the outcome;

### **1.4.2 Stage 2**

Complaint heard by Headteacher and the Chair of Governors informed of the outcome;

### **1.4.3 Stage 3**

Complaint heard by Chair of Governors or panel of Governors if appropriate.

### **1.5. Additional Notes**

If a complainant indicates that he/she would have difficulty discussing a complaint with a particular member of staff, then the complainant will be referred to another staff member.

Where the complaint concerns the Headteacher or a Governor, the complainant will be referred to the Chair of Governors.

If the member of staff directly involved feels too compromised to deal with a complaint, the complainant will be referred to another staff member. The ability to consider the complaint objectively and impartially is crucial.

Where the first approach is made to a governor, the next step would be to refer the complainant to the appropriate person and advise them about the procedure. Governors must not act unilaterally on an individual complaint outside the formal procedure, or be involved at the early stages in case they are needed to sit on a panel at a later stage of the procedure.

If after all stages of the procedure are exhausted the complainant is still dissatisfied with the outcome, they may make representations to the relevant officer of the Local Authority.

### **1.6. Managing and Recording Complaints**

A complaint may be made in person, by telephone, or in writing. A copy of appendix A should be used to record the details. At the end of a meeting or telephone call, the member of staff should ensure that the complainant and the school have the same understanding of what was discussed and agreed. A brief note of meetings and telephone calls should be kept and a copy of any written response added to the record. The Head's PA will be responsible for the records and hold them centrally.

### **1.7. Governing Body Review**

The GB will monitor the level and nature of complaints and review the outcomes on a regular basis to ensure the effectiveness of the procedure and make changes where necessary. Complaints information shared with the whole GB will not name individuals.

As well as addressing an individual's complaints, the process of listening to and resolving complaints will contribute to school improvement. When individual complaints are heard, schools may identify underlying issues that need to be addressed. The monitoring and review of complaints by the school and the GB will be a useful tool in evaluating the school's performance.

## Appendix A

### Whitecross Hereford: High School and Specialist Sports College

Please complete and return to the Head's Personal Assistant, who will acknowledge receipt and explain what action will be taken.

**Your name:**

**Student's name:**

**Your relationship to the student:**

**Address:**

**Postcode:**

**Day time telephone number:**

**Evening telephone number:**

**Please give details of your complaint:**

**What action, if any, have you already taken to try and resolve your complaint. (who did you speak to and what was the response)?**

**What actions do you feel might resolve the problem at this stage?**

**Are you attaching any paperwork? If so, please give details.**

**Signature:**

**Date:**

**For office use**

Date acknowledgement sent & by whom:

Complaint referred to:

Date: