



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	May 2025
Governor approved	October 2024	Key person/people	HT/Governors
Model Policy		Model localised	Yes
Pupil leadership team review	N/A		

COMPLAINTS POLICY & PROCEDURE

PART 1

Principles:

The Westgate School believes in taking a positive approach to complaints, that 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 Parents/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 between the School and parents/carers.

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 employee. We encourage Parents/Carers to approach employees directly with any concerns and aim to resolve issues through open dialogue and with mutual understanding and respect. If a concern cannot be satisfactorily resolved, parents/carers may wish to make a formal complaint using this process.

Scope of this Complaints Procedure

This procedure covers all complaints about any provision of community facilities or services by The Westgate School, other than complaints that are dealt with under other statutory procedures, such as admissions which are dealt with through Hampshire County Council. Where a complaint involves an external agency as part of an investigation, the School may suspend the internal complaints process to work in accordance with statutory requirements or partnership working (for example legal, safeguarding or disciplinary proceedings).

The Schools aims:

- To achieve satisfactory communication with Parents/Carers 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.

Overview:

- In the first instance, concerns should be raised with the appropriate person using the flowchart in Annexe C. Where a concern has not been resolved or in the situation where it may be more serious, parents/carers should follow the process for complaints.
- 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 or anyone acting on their behalf with appropriate consent to do so. Most things can be sorted out by talking to the person(s) concerned. Parents/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
- The school will not usually investigate anonymous complaints and in these circumstances, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will determine if the matter warrants an investigation, if appropriate.
- Complaints should reference a specific concern and parents/carers should avoid making reference to other people or, information gained through unofficial/unverified sources.
- Each complaint will be treated seriously, avoiding hasty assumptions. Complaints will be investigated by an appropriate leader 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. Parents/Carers will be asked to give evidence to the investigator as the basis for the complaint. Complaints can be withdrawn at any time and the school will ask you to confirm this in writing.
- In order for the School to deal with your complaint effectively, it would be helpful to receive complaints as soon as possible after the incident concerned. You must raise your complaint within 3 months of the incident or if a series of associated incidents, within 3 months of the last one taking place. However, in exceptional circumstances the school will consider complaints made outside of this timescale.
- Complaints made outside of term time will be deemed to have been received on the first school day after the holiday period.

- Should the school receive a number of complaints all based on the same subject or from complainants unconnected with the school, the Headteacher will consider how to respond to these complaints. In these circumstances the school may decide to send a template response to all complainants or to publish a single response on the website. These complaints will be acknowledged in the usual way and complainants updated on how the school intends to respond.
- Following a thorough investigation, parents/carers will receive a written response to their complaint. In the case of a complaint about an employee, parents will not be notified of the outcome because of employee confidentiality.
- 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.
- Parents will not be informed of the specific actions taken when a complaint refers to a specific employee or pupil as the School must adhere to appropriate expectations around GDPR and confidentiality.

Please see Annexe A 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 accordingly;
- 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.

All requests to escalate complaints to Stage 2 must be made to the Clerk to the Governors via the school office within 10 school days of receipt of the Stage 1 response. Requests received outside this timescale will be considered under exceptional circumstances.

The Clerk will record the date the request was received and acknowledge receipt in writing (either by letter or email) within 3 school days. The Clerk will write to the complainant to inform them of the dates of the meeting. The school will aim to convene a meeting within 20 working days of the Stage 2 request. If this timescale is not achievable, it will be convened as soon as practicably possible, and the complainant will be kept updated.

If the complainant rejects the offer of 3 proposed dates, the Clerk will decide whether to hold the meeting. If yes, it will then proceed in the complainant's absence with written submissions from both parties.

The committee will comprise of at least 3 governors with no prior knowledge or involvement in the complaint under consideration. 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.

Representatives from the media are not permitted to attend and the content of the meeting is confidential.

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 and use of hearing devices if provided. Please make the Clerk to Governors/Headteacher's PA aware as soon as possible and ideally, 3 to 5 school days before any meetings take place.

Next Steps

If the complainant believes the school did not handle their complaint in accordance with the published complaints procedure or they acted unlawfully or unreasonably in the exercise of their duties under education law, they can contact the Department for Education after they have completed Stage 2.

The Department for Education will not normally reinvestigate the substance of complaints or overturn any decisions made by School. They will consider whether the Westgate School has adhered to education legislation and any statutory policies connected with the complaint.

The complainant can refer their complaint to the Department for Education online at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus, by telephone on: 0370 000 2288 or by writing to:

Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD.

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 – unreasonable and persistent complaints

Annexe B – overview of process

Annexe C – flow chart and recommended procedures

Annexe D – Malicious Communications: Police Fact Sheet

Complaints Policy: Annexe A

Policy for dealing with Unreasonably Persistent Complaints, Harassment or Aggression

The Headteacher and employees investigate 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 employees in the school. Link to The Westgate School's Communications Policy: [Policy Documents | westgate-home](#)

In these exceptional circumstances the school may act 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 employees 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 employees.

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 Subject Access and 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 reasonable resolution.

Behaviour may fall within the scope of this policy if:

- it appears to be deliberately targeted at one or more employees 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 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 their 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 their behaviour to fall under the terms of the Unreasonably Persistent Complaints/ Harassment Policy;
- require any future meetings with employees 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.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, we will immediately inform the police and communicate our action in writing.

Complainants should try to limit their communication with the school about their complaint, whilst their complaint is being progressed. If repeated correspondence or contact is made by letter, phone, email, text or in person it could delay the progression of the investigation and an outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the Headteacher or Chair of Governors will discuss the concerns with the complainant informally before invoking the procedure. This will be confirmed in writing.

If the behaviour continues the Headteacher will write to the complainant with explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and being considered under this policy. The Headteacher will also specify methods of communication and times in a communication plan. This action may or may not include barring from the school premises. Any communication plan will be reviewed by the school after six months and lifted as appropriate.

Annexe B

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

Overview

WRITTEN COMPLAINTS

TELEPHONE COMPLAINTS

To be passed to the appropriate employee immediately. Acknowledgement sent immediately to parent/carer, ideally within two school-working days of receipt.

Reception should make it clear to Parent/Carer if the employee is unavailable/teaching. If it is urgent and serious then SLT/YL/FL should be informed.

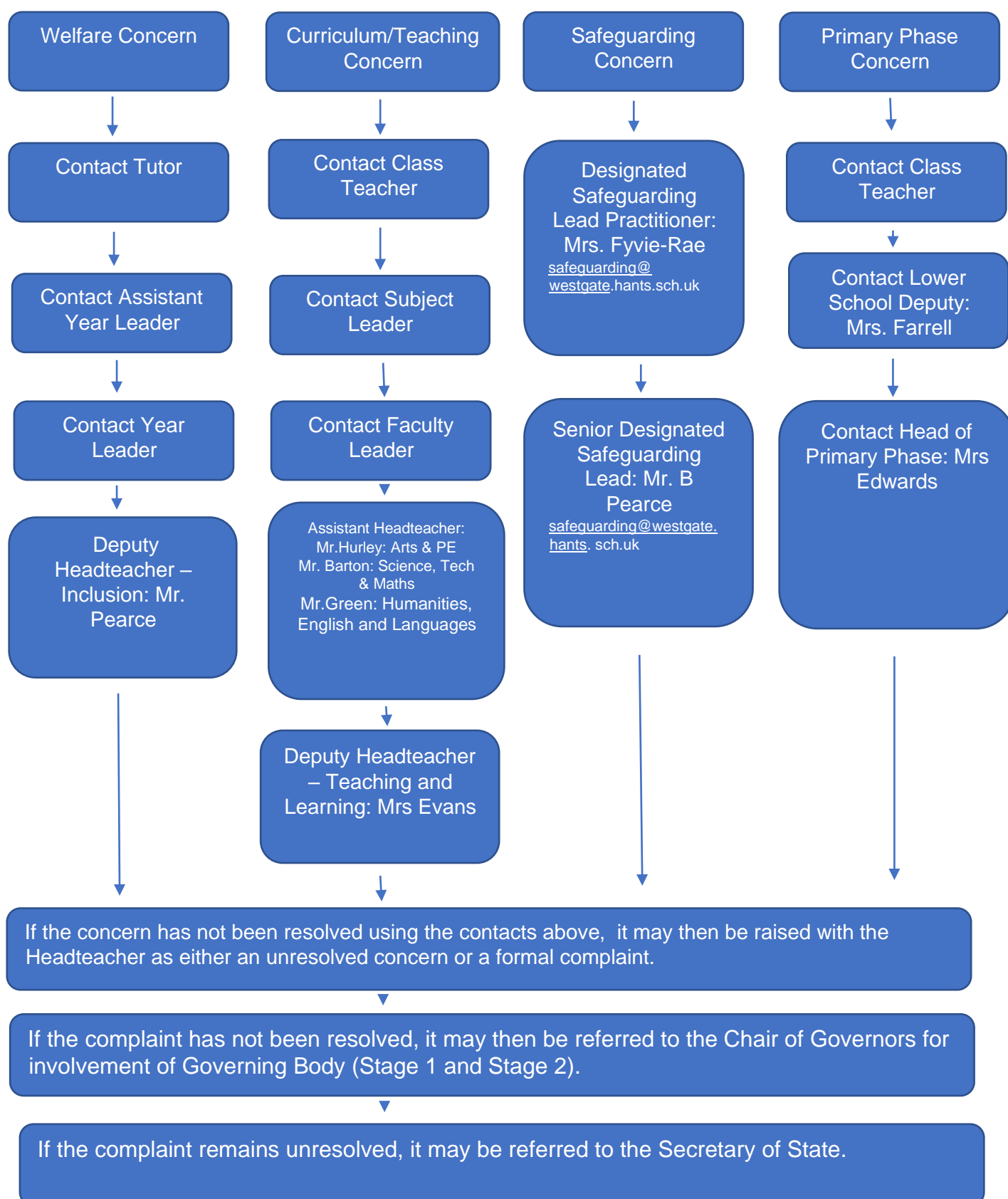
The complaint will be investigated including taking statements, reviewing documentation and meeting with parents/employees and pupils where appropriate such that details are established as promptly as possible. Written minutes from meetings may be taken; the school does not consent to the recording of meetings/telephone calls in any other format.

Based on the outcome a written response should ideally be sent within 10 working-school days. A phone call or meeting to discuss the matter may also be offered.

In the event of a further complaint, parents/carers should inform the Headteacher in writing and the process for investigating a Formal Complaint will be followed.

Annexe C

Procedure for Parents/Carers to Raise a Concern



ARE YOU THE VICTIM OF MALICIOUS COMMUNICATION?

A SELF-HELP GUIDE



Malicious communication relates to the sending of indecent, offensive or threatening letters, electronic communication or articles with the intent to cause the recipient distress or anxiety.

If you are a victim of malicious communication there are steps you can take to stop the behaviour of the other person. These are detailed below.



OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR VIA ELECTRONIC & WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

MAY INCLUDE BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO:

COMMUNICATION METHOD	+	THE CONTENT	=	A CRIME
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content grossly offensive, vulgar, outrageous, shameful, shocking, abusive, insulting That is indecent, degrading, humiliating, improper, especially in relation to sexual matters That is of a threatening nature and the threat is believed to be real That is sent using false information that is believed to be false by the sender Sent to cause the person or anyone else distress or anxiety 		

ADVICE

- Ask the offender to STOP and then do not communicate any further
- Do NOT delete correspondence - keep copies of conversations by saving emails or taking screenshots
- REPORT any threatening, offensive or indecent content to the host website/platform
- BLOCK or unfriend those making unwanted contact - refer to host website/platform or Get Safe Online link below for assistance
- Do NOT retaliate – arguments will only continue and make it hard to determine who is at fault
- Seek SUPPORT from agencies such as Victim Support or the Samaritans if you need to talk about the impact the situation is having on your life

FURTHER SUPPORT

Victim Support: www.victimsupport.org
 Samaritans: www.samaritans.org
 Get Safe Online: www.getsafeonline.org

